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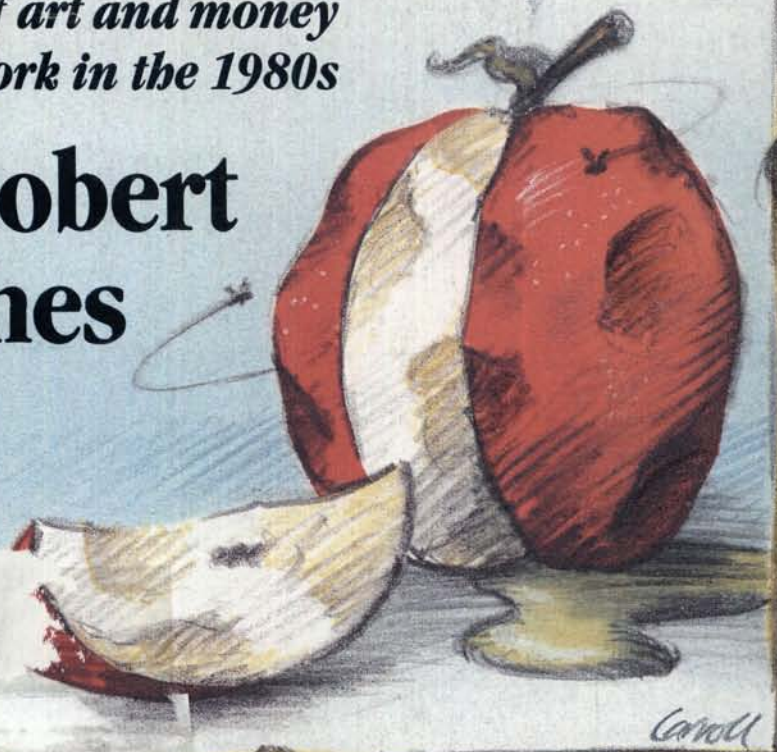
By Robert Hughes



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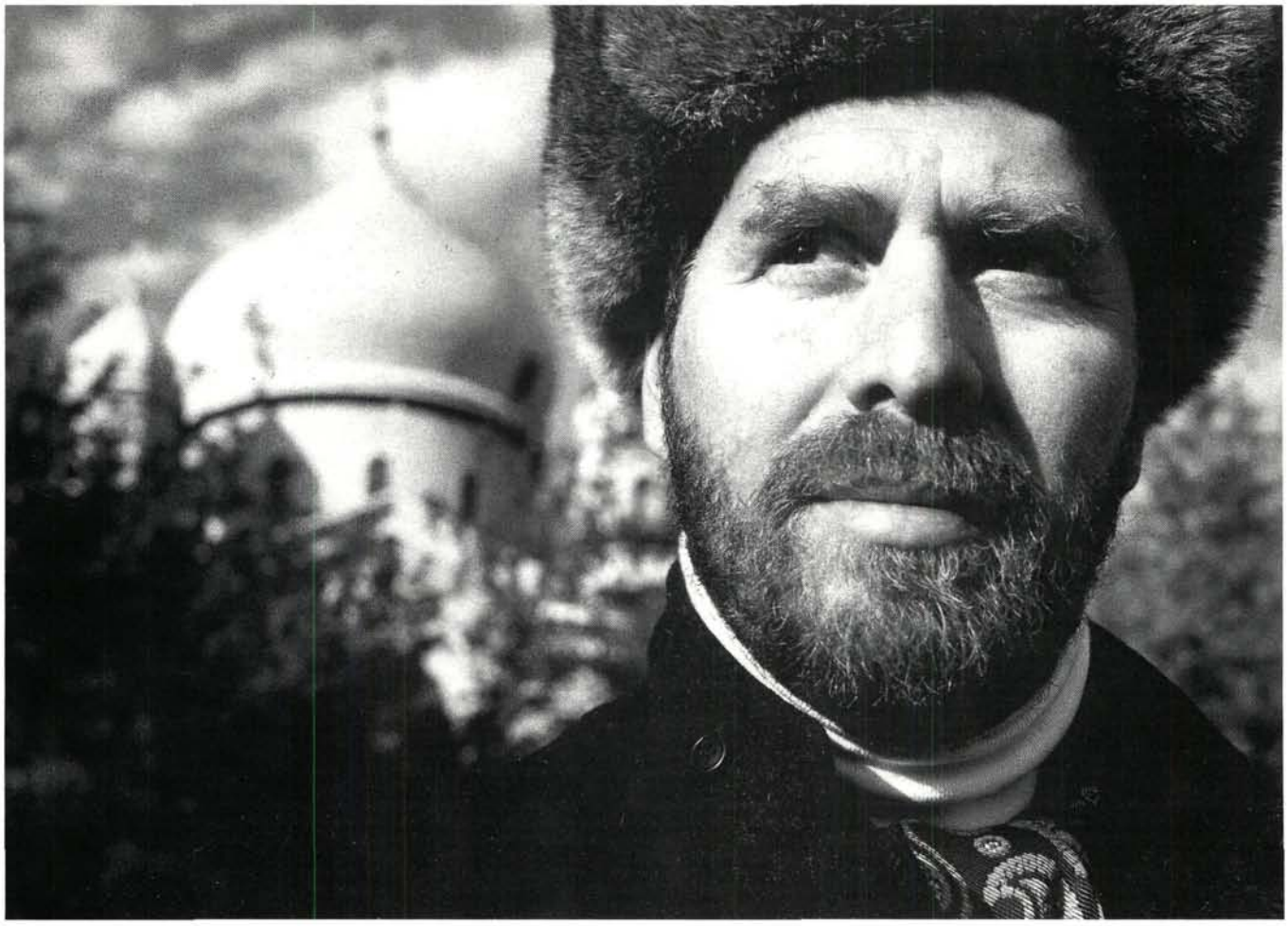

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

JUNE 25, 1990

FOUNDED 1914
WASHINGTON, D.C.
ISSUE 3,936

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THE NEW REPUBLIC, Vol. 202, Number 26 Issue 3,936, June 25, 1990. (Printed in the U.S. on June 6, 1990.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated Jan. 8 & 15, July 9 & 16, July 30 & Aug. 6, Aug. 20 & 27, and Sept. 10 & 17, 1990) at 1220 19th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone (202) 331-7494. Leadership Network advertising (212) 684-5500. Yearly subscriptions, $59.97; foreign, $89.97; Canada, $74.97. Back issues, $3.50 (includes postage & handling). ©1990 by The New Republic, Inc. (ISSN 0028-6583). Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Indexed in *Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. Available on microfilm from University Microfilms Intnl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor,* MI 48106 and Bell & Howell, Old Mansfield Road, Wooster, OH 44691. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Subscribers: Please send all remittances, changes of address, and subscription inquiries to Subscription Service Dept., The New Republic, P.O. Box 56515, Boulder, CO 80322. For subscription problems call 800-274-6686.

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FROM WASHINGTON

Perestroika bailout

Boris Yeltsin is the George Bush of the Soviet Union. Criticizing the steep price increases in the government's latest economic reform plan, he says: "We must find another transition to the market economy that does not lead to a deterioration in the standard of living." Free capitalism. No price increases. No unemployment. Read my lipskies.

In America, Gorbachev is still wildly popular outside the Beltway, but here in Washington they're virtually forming Yeltsin for President PACs. We're now in the third phase of fashionable Gorbo-skepticism. In phase one, Gorbachev was the brilliant mastermind of a nefarious plot to lull the West into foolish complaisance through phony, Potemkin reforms. When it became clear that the changes in the Soviet empire were fundamental, not phony, Gorbo was demoted from mastermind to irrelevant spectator: a cork bobbing in the sea of history, merely presiding over communism's inevitable collapse. That was phase two. Now we're in phase three: Gorbachev is a transitional figure, a Kerensky, who unleashed forces he can't control and has outlived his usefulness.

Maybe so. But why the relish, the schadenfreude, at Gorbachev's economic troubles? Although the latest round of reforms can be legitimately criticized for both ineptitude and timidity, it's not as if anyone—certainly including Boris Yeltsin—has any clear idea how to rescue the Soviet economy. It seems pretty obvious by now that Gorbachev would like to go all the way to free market capitalism. His economic problem is that you can't get there from here, at least not without vast disruption and suffering. Things get worse before they get better. His political problem is how to get people to take the chemotherapy.

Gorbachev's economic half-measures are causing his political problems, but the full "shock therapy" that people are urging on him would not solve them. Quite the opposite: it would make the short-run problems worse. Soviet economists estimate that the latest reform will throw 10 million people out of work. Shock therapy might cost 40 million jobs. *Forty million.* Worrying about Gorbachev is now passé, but anyone in his position—including Saint Boris—will face the same dilemma.

Criticism of Gorbachev's political timidity seems a bit smug coming from a rich society that can't even countenance an increase in the gasoline tax. More to the point, if we want the Soviet Union to move more boldly toward free market capitalism, why aren't we doing more to encourage that leap? Doing more doesn't mean more talk. It means practical help in crossing the abyss between here and there.

Yet the subject of serious economic assistance for the Soviets didn't even come up at the summit. It's not on the agenda. Having spent trillions of dollars bringing the cold war to this point, we seem unwilling to spend any money securing its demise in the only foolproof way: by turning the Soviet Union into a democratic, capitalist society.

A popular analogy these days is between the Soviet Union after losing the cold war and Germany after losing World War I. Goodness knows what bitter nationalism may fester, with bitter results for all parties. After World War II the same cautionary analogy led the United States to include Germany in the Marshall Plan. (Originally the Soviet Union was also supposed to be included, but Stalin said no.) That worked brilliantly. Why not try it again?

This needn't be thought of in terms of "helping Gorbachev." Is President Bush's personal-style diplomacy too dependent on one individual? Is Gorbachev's capacity for change exhausted? It doesn't matter. What matters vitally is the success of the experiment. The promise of massive economic assistance—assistance on the scale of what's at stake, for us as well as the Soviets—could be made contingent on all the things we want to happen: shock-therapy economics, military cutbacks, an end to the subsidy of Cuba, freedom for the Baltic republics, and so on. If Gorbachev goes along, he's our man for sure. If he balks, widespread awareness of this standing offer would hasten his departure.

Would massive financial aid to the Soviet Union just be money down the rathole? If it led the Soviets to do some of the things on our wish list, it might be money well spent simply as a bribe (an underrated tool of foreign policy). But the money needn't be wasted if it promotes rapid adjustment to a free market economy rather than shoring up the current mess. American business executives eyeing the Soviet market already clamor for loan guarantees and whatnot. But instead of subsidizing a lot of development projects that the market can judge better on its own, why not offer to help finance some kind of social safety net for a few years? People are being asked to give up guaranteed jobs, subsidized food and housing, etc. It would ease the political problem of getting them to take the plunge if they knew they would only plunge so far.

Or is the Soviet economic disaster just too massive and hopeless for any amount of Western assistance to make any difference? Some knowledgeable people think so, and they may be right. But if so—if the Soviet economy is like a dead lake, so polluted that it can never revive—then perestroika has been a disservice to the Soviet people. It only made things worse. No one making U.S. policy admits to being that pessimistic.

Jeffrey Sachs, a Harvard economics professor (and TNR contributor) who has been advising the Polish government, thinks that aid of something like $30 billion a year for three or four years could make a real difference in the prospects for successfully establishing capitalism in the Soviet Union.

That's a lot of money. And, yes, there's no reason other prosperous Western nations shouldn't shoulder some, or even most, of the load. (Germany is already offering to finance housing for returning Soviet troops.) But does the United States wish to continue as leader of the free world or does it not? If it does, it can't balk at a challenge like this simply because of the cost. Four years of $30 billion amounts to $480 per U.S. citizen. That's less per person, in real terms, than the Marshall Plan—and the country is four times as rich.

Whatever the merits of massive aid to the Soviet Union, the size of the project, not those merits, is what makes it so unthinkable for the United States in 1990. If $120 billion over the next few years could help capitalism and democracy take root in the Soviet Union, this would save the United States far more than $120 billion in defense costs in the long run. So the question may be whether we are capable of making a short-term economic sacrifice for our own long-term self-interest. But then, that always seems to be the question these days.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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CORRESPONDENCE

Civic lessons

To the editors:
In "For a New Equality" (May 7) Mickey Kaus practices an insidious form of political conservatism. It is one that nominally adopts the ideals of a socially concerned liberalism while proceeding to find that the causes of inequality are deep economic facts essentially beyond our control, and that the current economic arrangement turns out to be the best solution anyway.

His series of slick rebuttals to each of the various liberal strategies for reducing income inequality through redistribution suffers from a basic flaw: he provides no argument whatsoever that these strategies will fail to have a significant effect when taken all together. It may be true that none is a miracle cure independently; all that matters is they achieve the desired effect collectively.

Kaus proposes replacing the goal of income equality with some allegedly deeper notion of social equality achieved by reducing the importance of money. Sounds good, until we find out that this social equality, when it goes beyond standard liberal causes such as access to day care, is a matter of solidarity, rubbing shoulders, equal dignity, etc., between rich and poor. Conveniently, this kind of equality can survive "even in the face of huge differences of income." Kaus indulges the fantasy that his kid would have the same doctor as some welfare kid. This "pleasure of equality" is more important to him than the fact that the welfare kid must return to the only hovel her parents can actually afford.

TIM VAN GELDER
Bloomington, Indiana

To the editors:
According to Kaus's data, we could more than double the total tax rate on the rich—far more than anyone in politics today is even considering—and they would still have left, after taxes, a bigger share of the country's wealth than they had in 1977. That sounds more like an argument for it than against it.

The question of how much inequality is too much is sophistry. In American politics we deal with crises—and when situations become tolerable again, we forget them. So if today we look at some people going homeless, malnourished, and without health care while others flaunt and waste their wealth, we know that something must be done quickly at the very least to "slow the growth" of the disparity. But we do not really need to pause and ponder the agonizing question of when we will be able to declare victory, and whether we might in our enthusiasm go too far. Rest assured: when our inner cities cease to be tragic embarrassments, there will be plenty of pressure to turn to some other issue.

DAVID HYMAN
San Francisco, California

To the editors:
Perhaps I'm too far outside the Beltway to understand the great debates shaping our national policies, but I couldn't help thinking that Mickey Kaus's argument "For a New Equality" was much ado about a non-issue. I found the rhetorical construction of "Money Liberalism" a straw man, the critique of tax progressivity gratuitous, and the putative alternative of "Civic Liberalism" little more than a restatement of traditional Democratic Party thinking since FDR.

The Democratic Party has never paid much more than lip service to income equality, and then chiefly to pacify the Huey Longs and Jesse Jacksons on its populist fringes. Instead, the party has consistently supported "equality of opportunity" to address the economic ambitions of its working class and ethnic constituencies. This is a commitment to economic mobility, not economic egalitarianism.

WALT CROWLEY
Seattle, Washington

To the editors:
Mickey Kaus, either out of confusion or despair, joins other liberals in accepting the right's tax agenda as immutable. He throws up his hands at the worst effect of supply-side policy—the polarization of our polity into an aristocracy of tax-avoiding owners and a mass of non-owners whose tax burdens are rising.

Worse, Kaus likes the liberals' rightist tax policy idea—the Value-Added Tax (a national sales tax). He shrugs favorably with Harvard economist Benjamin Friedman and others who advocate a VAT on everything from cars to candles—a steeply and irreparably regressive tax that non-owners would pay more of than owners. It's the Bruce Babbitt syndrome redux: we are all to blame for the fiscal mess, so the only way out is to make everybody pay.

That's both economic and political nonsense. And the allegedly illiberal politicians of the Democratic Leadership Council, of all people, know it—and said as much in the statement they released at the close of their recent conference in New Orleans: "The payroll tax burden on average American families needs to be reduced and progressivity restored to the overall tax structure so that Americans are taxed according to their ability to pay."

Kevin Phillips, the conservative analyst, thinks that a left-liberal resurgence is already under way here and in Thatcher's Britain as well. Strange, isn't it, that the "White Boys" of the Democratic Party are pushing economic populism on this side of the pond, while liberals like Kaus are in ignominious retreat?

BRUCE FISHER
Washington, D.C.

The writer is research director of the Citizens for Tax Justice.

The wrong rights

To the editors:
Michael Kinsley (TRB, "Minority Rules," May 28) correctly draws a parallel between many white South Africans' call for "group rights" and the (tragic) evolution in our country toward similar discriminatory standards (now typically advanced behind the bland banner of "diversity"). But it is not only "white conservatives who talk about the color-blind vision." Nelson Mandela obviously has long talked this way. So did (and do) many black activists in the United States.

The most obvious lesson to be drawn from South Africa is that "group rights," once bestowed, are not easily surrendered or wrested away from a corrupt society. But Kinsley defends group rights because blacks and whites are unlikely to develop "perfect trust."

FRANK V. CESPEDES
Boston, Massachusetts

Poor reception

To the editors:
In "Fine Tuning" (May 28) Morton Kondracke writes that the U.S. Information Agency is opposing the study of U.S. international broadcasting recommended by Representative Dante Fascell.

Not so. Far from being against the proposed study, we would welcome it and in fact have worked very closely with the National Security Council staff in the preparation of the administration's position paper on international broadcasting.

On another point: the article said the VOA's 1991 budget request is "still $13 billion short of what's required to maintain current levels of service." The correct figure is of course $13 million.

FRANK S. JOHNSON JR.
Washington, D.C.

The writer is director of the USIA's office of public liaison.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JUNE 25, 1990

POTEMKIN SUMMIT

We all know why Prince Potemkin built phony villages along the Dnieper prior to Catherine the Great's grand tour to Sebastopol. It was to fool her into thinking he had economically developed the Caucasus. But why did George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev conduct a Potemkin summit the other week in Washington? It must have been to fool the publics of their two countries into believing that they are in control of events and are really guiding the world into "a new era of mutual cooperation."

Some Americans may believe that televised signing ceremonies and repeated displays of chumminess can bring order to the world. Bush may even believe it. But the Soviet people, shaking their fists and muttering in their food lines, do not. The reality that the two leaders hesitated to confront is that the Soviet system is collapsing, possibly heading for violent upheaval, and that the United States can do next to nothing about it.

Nonetheless, up went the facades. Bush and Gorbachev put out a "joint statement" on nuclear arms, but they cannot agree on a real treaty because the Soviets still want to test new versions of their huge SS-18 missile, which would completely undo the effects of a supposed 50 percent reduction in heavy missile warheads.

Similarly, after Gorbachev pressed and nagged, Bush agreed to sign a trade agreement that the Soviet leader said was necessary to encourage American business to take a plunge into the Soviet market. In reality, Bush will not submit the agreement to Congress for ratification, nor will Congress grant preferred trade status to the Soviets, until Gorbachev lifts his economic embargo against Lithuania. That's the good news: Bush yielded only on the level of appearances. But on the level of grim reality in Vilnius, Gorbachev gave no indication whatever that he's about to loosen his vise.

On the other most important issue dividing the two sides—unified Germany's membership in NATO—the Soviets publicly continue to resist the inevitable, and Bush did not really press them to accede. Germany was discussed at one negotiating session only, in contrast to trade, which Gorbachev brought up again and again until he got somewhere.

Administration officials tell reporters that there was actually more progress on Germany than meets the eye. They say that for the first time, albeit in private, Gorbachev told Bush he accepts the need for U.S. troops in Europe (which implies the continued existence of NATO) and that he agreed that the German people have the right to decide what alliance they want to belong to. They hope this means that Gorbachev is in the process of yielding, and they say that Bush wanted to give him "a little slack" in coming to terms. We suspect that Gorbachev is simply waiting for the right price. The administration has proposed nine points, eight of which give the Soviets security guarantees. In all likelihood it's the ninth—money, to be paid by Germany—that Gorbachev wants the most.

Behind the Washington facade lies the Moscow reality. The Soviet Union cannot pay its bills. Perestroika has destroyed old structures but has not produced workable new ones. The Soviet people are hungry and fed up with their government. Gorbachev, the instigator of reform, appears too timid to follow it through to its logical conclusion: market-oriented democracy. And now, instead of facing his foremost challenge from the

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reactionary right, it is coming from a radical populist, Boris Yeltsin, who threatens to neutralize the very basis of Gorbachev's power, the presidency of the USSR.

Seemingly as part of its campaign to make Gorbachev "feel comfortable," the Bush White House put it out that it views Yeltsin as a "lightweight" with "preposterous ideas," a "Huey Long." That is yesterday's conventional wisdom, partly established by a propaganda campaign directed against Yeltsin by Gorbachev boosters in Moscow, partly based on Yeltsin's drunken, skirt-chasing shenanigans in Washington last year.

Today's conventional wisdom about Yeltsin is that he's an earthy man of the people, yes, but also a courageous spokesman for multiparty democracy, an enemy of corruption and special privilege and a champion of radical economic reform. The Soviet émigré and scholar Dimitri Simes of the Carnegie Endowment says Yeltsin resembles Lech Walesa more than Huey Long. Jeremy Azrael of the RAND Corp. points out that Yeltsin is the one local Communist Party boss ever to face his constituency in a free election and win in a landslide.

Both characterizations of Yeltsin may be true, and even they may not be the whole truth. Starting with Bush, Americans constantly overpersonalize politics. It's the "Man of the Year," "Person of the Week" syndrome. We oughtn't do it again with Yeltsin as we have with Gorbachev. What's taking place in the Soviet Union now could transcend either rival and represent an epic clash of classes. The present moment could be what Trotsky called "dual power"—the period when a fading old order has not yet lost control, and a rising new class has not yet seized power. "The splitting of sovereignty foretells nothing less than a civil war," he wrote.

And it could happen in the Soviet Union. Sovereignty surely is being split. Gorbachev, unelected by the people, controls the central government and (ironically for a reformer) is relying on the army, the KGB, and the Communist Party as his bases of power. Yeltsin, so far merely the presiding officer of the parliament of the Russian republic, represents a coalition of radical free market intellectuals and the put-upon proletariat—not always the most stable of alliances when hard economic choices have to be made.

Yeltsin seems intent on making a dramatic bid for power. He wants to get himself freely elected as president of Russia (a nation of 150 million), to declare Russia independent of Soviet control, to establish a separate foreign and economic policy, and he wants Russia to make its own agreements with other federations of what's now the Soviet Union. In effect, he wants to make Gorbachev's presidency of the Union a figurehead post. He already has recognized Lithuanian independence and has promised to bypass Gorbachev's blockade. Suppose he sends supply trucks rolling into Lithuania or tries to open oil pipelines. Will Gorbachev send the army to arrest him? Whom will the army obey? And what will the masses do?

That's the kind of scenario Trotsky might envision. On the other hand, there is a chance that Yeltsin's rise and Gorbachev's crisis could produce a desirable end—if Gorbachev uses Yeltsin's slogans (as yet he really lacks a concrete economic program) to reignite reform. Yeltsin says he favors private property, multiparty democracy, free speech, and a Soviet confederation rather than an empire. That's what we all once hoped Gorbachev was for too.

In their most private sessions, Bush could have urged Gorbachev to hasten economic reforms, stand for election, let the Baltics go. He could have promised rewards if Gorbachev did so, though there is not close to enough money available in the United States to ease the economic shocks that the Soviet Union faces. In the absence of the power to control events in the Soviet Union, Bush should have pushed harder for things that help the United States and its allies: specifically, swifter Soviet troop withdrawals from Eastern Europe and agreement to German membership in NATO. Regrettably, he has little to show for the Washington summit except warm exchanges with a Soviet leader who may soon be out of power.

THE PLO CHORUS

For years now there has been a loud—if not exactly large—chorus in America asserting that the Palestine Liberation Organization has forsworn its terrorist habits and is ready to assume the responsibilities of statecraft. In its waning days the Reagan administration put its own warrant of approval on this marginal view and opened a dialogue with Yasir Arafat's emissaries in Tunis. This put the State Department in the difficult position of having to certify and recertify that the PLO had not lapsed into its former ways. Alas, old (and cherished, and ideological, and exciting) habits die hard. Time and time again the various wings and winglets of the movement to liberate Palestine from the Jews, and some of its individual operatives as well, reverted to what they did best, an assassination here, a bombing there, random acts of small-scale terror everywhere.

Despite this sorry record, Foggy Bottom put out a report last March saying essentially that what had happened had not happened, but if it had happened it could not be blamed on the PLO itself. (Glasnost is not the way of revolutionaries. They do not make a public record of their discussions, which makes it easier to deny responsibility when necessary.) The official line is that the PLO has crossed the threshold into respectability. But unfortunately for James Baker, the members of Congress savviest on the Middle East, including Larry Smith of Florida and Lee Hamilton of Indiana (who's no special partisan of the Israelis), treated this document as the howler it was. Even the enthusiasts of our Tunis diplomacy were a bit embarrassed by the trans-

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parency of the whitewash. Covering over enormities is not a job for amateurs.

The perpetrators of these particular enormities don't make it easy for their friends. The Arab summit convened by Saddam Hussein in Baghdad was itself a sign that the new reasonableness of the so-called moderate Muslim states was all but over. President Mubarak of Egypt demurred from the hard-line consensus just enough to make sure that the money pipeline from America would not be clogged by ideology. But even King Hussein of Jordan joined the hysteria, not only anti-Israel but anti-United States, too. The presence of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia gave this hysteria the weightiness that his absence would have denied. This has to be more than a bit disappointing to George Bush, who has done more than any other American president to assure the Arabs that there does not now reside in the White House anyone you could plausibly call a friend of Israel.

Whatever the consequences among the Israelis of Bush's churlishness to Israel, there were few consequences among the Arabs. In retrospect, of course, there was no reason to think that the belligerence of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq might be meliorated by American pressure on Israel. Hussein is the way he is for Arab, not for Jewish, reasons. It is instructive that his recent ascendancy within the ranks of his brethren was not at all impeded by the fact that he has gassed tens of thousands of other Muslims, Shiites, and Kurds, in Iraq and out. Why should anyone have thought that his threats to Israel would make him a pariah among his own?

But this was not only Saddam Hussein's show; it was also Arafat's. The two are now a team. That's how they present themselves, and for once they are not lying. But they are not a team of equals; Arafat is in Hussein's debt, and maybe in his thrall. The Arab leaders signed up behind both. When Arafat persuaded them to go along with the Palestinian hard line, it was also no break with the Arab past. For almost three-quarters of a century, in fact, the usually elusive goal of Arab unity has been fulfilled only in relation to Zionism.

What never fails is the specter of Jewish migration to Israel, the palpable evidence of the resilience of the Zionist will. So the Jewish refugees from the Soviet Union roused the Arab phobias again, just as Jewish immigration had traumatized their predecessors. (Mikhail Gorbachev has added to the hysteria by repeating the falsehood that the Israeli government is settling the immigrants in the occupied territories; and on television Senator Robert Dole was seen nodding in eager agreement with Gorbachev's fabrication.) It is an issue on which the leadership could not fail to back Arafat, of whom some of them must surely be tiring. Taking this support as his victory, Arafat pledged again to take Jerusalem.

Arafat's legions are more practical. Just as the Baghdad summit was ending, one such armed legion of Palestinians embarked on a spectacular mission: to kill as many Jews as they could on the beaches south of Tel Aviv. Some of the terrorists escaped by speedboats; others were killed. A few were captured. From these it was learned that this complicated assault from the sea on holidaying civilians was an undertaking of the Palestine Liberation Front, a constituent member in good standing of the PLO and last heard from in a big way during the *Achille Lauro* hijacking. The Front's chief is Muhammad Abu Abbas, one of the fifteen-member PLO executive committee. His atrocities can't be fobbed off on those rogue Palestinians, the ones in hock to Hafez Assad's Syria. He is mainstream. Let's face it: had his raid succeeded, had his troops shed enough Jewish blood, he would have been a great hero to the Palestinians. They are lucky that he failed.

But failure has not kept the PLO chorus in America from being discomfited. Take Anthony Lewis as an example. He has been vouching in *The New York Times* for the PLO's bona fides for more than a decade. Now, in his column of June 5, Lewis, like others, implores Arafat to salvage his analysis. It is not so much Arafat's credibility that is at stake. It is Lewis's, and all those who have testified, against all the evidence, that the Palestinian movement is no longer a terrorist movement. The credibility of the State Department is at stake, too, and its capacity to make sound judgments that should persuade Israelis. Arafat did not help the apologetic chorus out of their corner. He said simply that he did not do it, that he did not know of it. What the chorus needed for its own political purposes was for him to denounce the Front, renounce its actions, discipline its leadership.

There are lessons to learn from Arafat's failure to do any of this. The most sympathetic is that he cannot take these steps. Daoud Kuttab, a Palestinian journalist often described as moderate, explains that the PLO is governed by a democratic parliament. That's a sentimental way of phrasing the constraints on Arafat. Another way of putting this is that the PLO is ungovernable. Either way, Arafat's pledges are not to be taken as binding.

We believe something different, that terror, rather than being a vice of PLO extremists, remains both the tactic and the strategy of the Palestinian mainstream. That's the meaning of the seaborne mission on the beach. Predictably, without missing a step, eager interlocutors are again trying to script Arafat into saying the right words abjuring terrorism, as they did late in 1988. We know that the State Department has been coaching and coaxing him once more in the vernacular of responsible politics. This is phrase-making to disguise realities.

Of course, a year and a half ago there were many Israelis ready to accept Arafat's promise to Secretary of State George Shultz to end Palestinian terrorism. Today they are wiser. Probably fewer of them believe now the other, more implicit, part of Arafat's promise at that time: that the Palestinians seek statehood only in the territories. But enough has been said by Palestinian leaders to Palestinian masses to doubt that too. As the syndicated columnist Mona Charen put it in *The Boston Globe*, "They are not fighting and dying for the dry patch of earth between the Jordan River and the Israeli border." They are fight-

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ing for the ground of Israel itself.

There are many Palestinians in the territories who are willing to settle for less. Let them elect negotiators to talk with the government of Israel. But if the Bush administration gets Arafat to mouth the prescribed lines on terrorism in order to maintain its dialogue with the PLO, it will only be burdening its peace initiative with the participation of spoilers. Of course, it won't be easy to convince the Palestinians in the territories to go to the conference table without Arafat as their shield. Nonetheless, that is the precondition for substantial concessions from Israel. With Iraq in ascent in the Arab world, and competing with Syria for that ascendancy, any concessions pose risks for Israel. If the Palestinians don't move to get what they can now, they will have their self-anointed friends to blame. Having urged them to hold out for more, these friends of the Palestinians will have helped them get nothing.

NOTEBOOK

WHO'S AFRAID?: On the bloody night of June 3, 1989, People's Liberation Army vehicles brought crashing down the statue of the Goddess of Democracy that had been erected by demonstrating students in Tiananmen Square. In the year since it has sometimes looked as if the democracy movement itself would meet a similar fate. A replica statue was quickly put together in Hong Kong, but the authorities, fearful of Beijing's reaction, refused to give it a permanent place. The goddess ended up in a garbage dump. The radio ship Goddess of Democracy, which intended to broadcast to the Chinese mainland from international waters off the coast, met a similar fate. After a rough sea journey from France, it was shunned in Asia. Its radio transmitter was impounded in Taiwan, and authorities in Hong Kong and Japan refused the ship permission to dock. All appeared to act under pressure from the People's Republic. The ship's sponsors, their funds exhausted, were forced to sell the vessel. But Beijing's brutal gerontocracy has been less successful in cowing its own people. On the anniversary of the massacre, hundreds of students at Beijing University—a campus virtually under siege—renewed their calls for democracy, marching, making outspoken speeches, and lighting candles in memory of the dead. Their slogan was, "*Bei Da bu pa!*": "Beijing University is not afraid!" Tokyo, Taipei, Hong Kong, Washington: please take note.

DISCRIMINATING FELLOW: George Bush made a big show earlier this year of calling for an end to discrimination against AIDS sufferers. Yet in defiance of decency and common sense, the White House continues to bar people infected with the HIV virus from entering the country. The issue isn't medical. Even the president's own health advisers admit there is no compelling reason to deny visas to people who are HIV-positive. The White House claims that its hands are tied by an amendment added to an appropriations bill a few years ago by noted public health authority Jesse Helms, which added HIV to the list of conditions that can be used to deny entry. Only last month, however, Bush refused to back a bill proposed in Congress that would have specifically granted the White House the authority to remove HIV infection from the list. And in any case, according to the General Accounting Office the Helms amendment doesn't prohibit the Bush administration from striking AIDS off the list, since it's up to the secretary of health and human services to decide which diseases are grounds for exclusion. With minimal effort, the White House clearly could change this shameful policy. On June 20 thousands of AIDS experts, activists, and researchers are scheduled to attend the sixth annual international AIDS conference in San Francisco. Many are threatening to boycott the meeting because of the immigration policy. By acting promptly, Bush could save the meeting and restore a bit of his own honor in the process.

BARRY'S OFFENSIVE: *The Friday Report*, a tabloid being distributed around Washington by supporters of Mayor Marion Barry, is pushing a petition to the U.N. charging that his civil rights were violated by his arrest for crack. The petition claims that "since 1984 the U.S. Government, in collusion with *The Washington Post* and other media, has continually slandered, brutalized, and terrorized the Mayor and his family as well as the citizens of the District of Columbia." This squares with Barry's new line that he did smoke crack after all, but that the true guilt lies with prosecutors: they tried to kill him with stuff that was too pure. An editorial by Barry campaign manager, Anita Bonds, goes on to compare Barry's plight to "the period of routine lynching of Black men and the exterminations of the Jews," and absurdly predicts that the prosecution will cost more than $50 million in taxpayers' money. Also included: a laudatory article on "Marion Barry as a Role Model."

PRICE OF THE TICKET: The only qualification for a spot on the New York Republican Party's gubernatorial slate is deep pockets. Pierre Rinfret, the rich nobody who is challenging Mario Cuomo for governor, bought his place by promising to spend $500,000 of his own money on the campaign. This is the political equivalent of a vanity press book. Herbert London, a dean at New York University who is slightly more qualified as fodder, was rejected because, in the words of one party bigwig, "he doesn't bring any money to the table." He may, however, be able to afford the lieutenant governor's slot, which goes on sale next week for $7.99.

INFOTAINMENT TONIGHT: NBC's "Nightly News with Tom Brokaw" is apparently too substantive. Executive producer Steve Friedman, who turned *USA Today*

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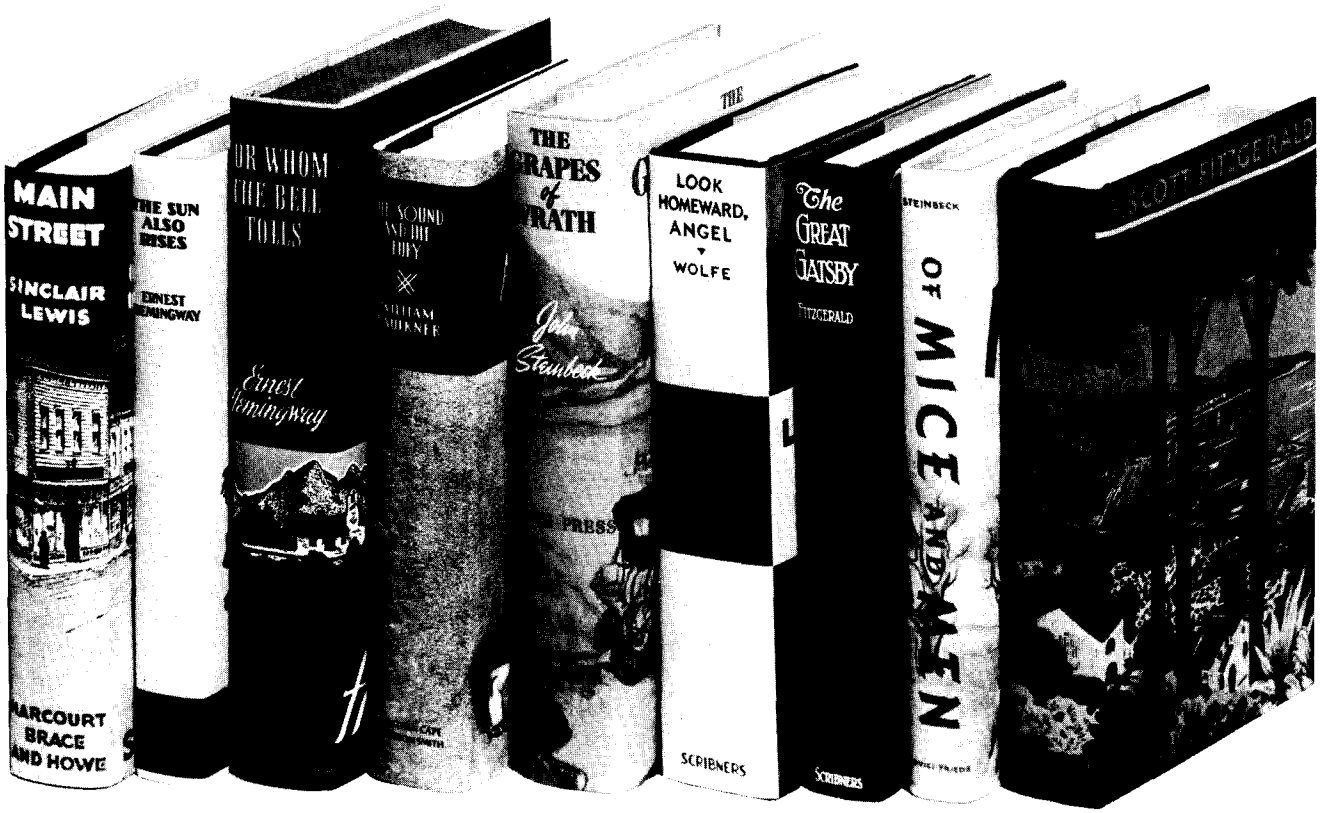

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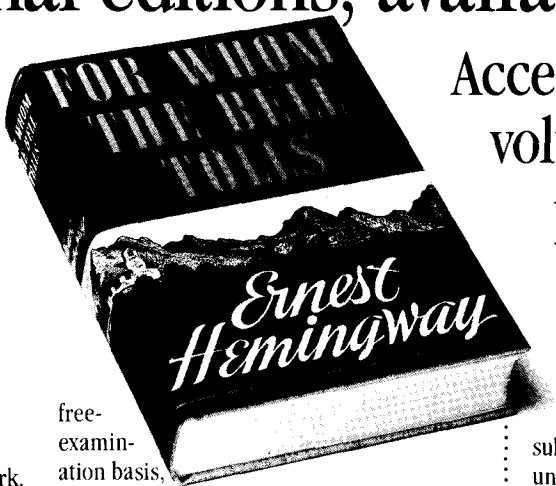

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into a dull and boring TV show, told Bill Carter of *The New York Times* that the network's broadcast was "dull and boring." To spice it up, NBC is bringing Jane Pauley aboard as anchor and will send Tom Brokaw out to the live scene of dramatic events like earthquakes and superpower summits. "We want to make it a show of interest," Friedman said, "not the show of record." Who ever accused it of that?

BEACH PARTY LEADER: As their meeting with Gorbachev was being planned, congressional Democrats looked around for their chief, Speaker of the House Thomas Foley. When would he be arriving for the big meeting? His office informed them that the Speaker would not be leaving the beach in Barbados where he was tanning during the recess. Nowhere in the daily press was his absence noticed. •

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

BE NICE TO GORBY

By Fred Barnes

Boris Yeltsin threw two tantrums when he visited the White House last September. The first was in the driveway outside the West Wing. Thinking he was being slighted because President Bush didn't personally greet him, Yeltsin refused to get out of his car. He responded to coaxing, then halted just inside the basement door. "I will not move one step further unless I meet with the president," Yeltsin said. "No meet with Scowcroft." Assured he'd get to see Bush, Yeltsin reluctantly walked upstairs to the office of Brent Scowcroft, Bush's national security adviser. John Sununu, the White House chief of staff, bumped into Yeltsin in the hallway. Bush and Vice President Dan Quayle dropped by separately for brief chats. But most of Yeltsin's visit was devoted to his long-winded answers to Scowcroft's questions.

Yeltsin made a dreadful impression, a fact the White House exploited before, during, and after the recent summit to make Mikhail Gorbachev feel warm and comfy in Washington. Beforehand, a White House aide trashed Yeltsin, Gorbachev's chief democratic rival, as an intellectual lightweight. That quote got around fast. During the East Room press conference at the close of the summit, Gorbachev criticized Yeltsin as a flip-flopper. Brit Hume of ABC rushed up to Bush when the press conference ended to ask his view of Yeltsin. Bush ducked the question, indicating he didn't want to take anything away from Gorbachev's assessment of Yeltsin. After the summit Bush aides were still at it, talking about the "preposterous statements" Yeltsin had made in his monologue in Scowcroft's office. One was the idea that the United States should build millions of houses in the Soviet Union.

Normally it's bad form to bad-mouth an opposition leader. That person, after all, might take power someday. But given Bush's determination to produce a summit congenial to Gorbachev, an exception was made in Yeltsin's case. Bush went to extraordinary lengths to create good vibrations and minimal stress. He gave in to Gorbachev's pleas that he sign a trade treaty. He made small personal gestures, like backing up Gorbachev after the Soviet leader had suggested to reporters, wrongly, that a breakthrough in negotiations over German unification was imminent. And he refrained from exerting pressure. Instead he stressed the rewards Gorbachev would reap from tilting toward the American position. If Gorbachev reduced his aid to Fidel Castro, Bush said, he'd improve Soviet relations with the United States and also save money.

Bush's be-nice-to-Gorby strategy had two higher purposes. One was to create what Sununu calls "a process in which they can frequently and informally discuss, to any depth, issues, particularly those they don't agree on." In other words, they'd be able to chat like pals, the way Bush and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl do. Getting to that level of comfort was impossible at Malta last December. Stormy weather kept Bush and Gorbachev apart much of the time. They were unable to have long, candid conversations, one-on-one. At this summit, they were. At their first session on May 31, Bush and Gorbachev lingered in the Oval Office alone (except for interpreters) for two hours, ignoring the schedule that called for them to join aides. In that meeting and later, Bush made it clear he wasn't going to hector, lecture, or teach Gorbachev.

Bush's second goal was to move Gorbachev gently toward acceptance of a unified, non-neutral Germany. Bush wanted to "create the best political context in which the Soviet Union could go along with our formula for Germany's continued participation in NATO," an official who participated in the summit said. "If this summit had soured for any reason, it would have seriously damaged the prospects for this." Despite his reputation as a compromiser, Bush is adamant on the point that Germany must stay in NATO. So is Secretary of State James Baker. Bush tried to cushion the blow of losing East Germany by offering nine sweeteners (no nukes in Germany, no NATO forces in East Germany, money for the Soviets, etc.).

In the two-and-a-half hours they talked about Germany, Gorbachev made one concession that may or may not amount to much. At Malta he'd agreed that it's up to the Germans, West and East, whether they should reunify. This time he said the German people should decide what alliance, if any, they want to join. When Gorbachev said this, his aides had what one White House official describes as "an ashen look." They "were not happy," says another Bush aide. Bush followed up by saying:

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"Well, then we agree the German people can decide if they want to be in NATO." (Bush is certain that Germans are solidly pro-NATO.) At this point, Gorbachev and his underlings paused for a private huddle. When they returned, Gorbachev said the matter should be turned over to the foreign ministers. It was.

Should Bush have pursued the issue and sought to wring a formal agreement from Gorbachev on Germany? Maybe, but he didn't. Pushing an issue to closure was not his approach with Gorbachev. Rather, it was to keep Gorbachev moving in the right direction—without pushing. "Our feeling is that Gorbachev understands he's better off with Germany in NATO, but he's got to find a way to make that acceptable to his party and his people," says a senior adviser. It is anybody's guess how the Bush crowd knows this. I think they've transformed a wish into the premise for a policy. Anyway, they're apologetic about Gorbachev. "He's got tremendous political pressure against German reunification," the adviser says. "He's got to have some time." Of course, it's the Soviet government that's responsible for a lot of this pressure, having propagandized for forty-five years about a new Nazi threat in Germany.

Bush wasn't about to allow Lithuania to impede progress in his relationship with Gorbachev. For Bush, Lithuania is a problem to be mentioned often, but never allowed to affect policy toward the Soviets. He was eager to convince Gorbachev that "we are not going to try to take advantage of geopolitical change in Europe at his expense," an official says. "If we can persuade Gorbachev of that, that'll be a historic achievement." One way was to give Gorbachev the trade treaty that he pleaded for whenever he got Bush alone (he even made his trade pitch at the White House state dinner). Before the summit, Bush had signaled that an easing of Soviet pressure on Lithuania was a prerequisite. But he abandoned that and signed the treaty. At the press conference, he insisted that the only thing he now requires before granting most favored nation status as well is Soviet enactment of a free emigration law. Gorbachev can get that passed whenever he wants.

Sununu's analogy for dealing with the Soviets is bringing in a twelve-pound fish on a two-pound line. That means "a little bit of slack, a little bit of tension." At the summit, Bush offered mostly slack. For the final round of talks at Camp David on June 2, Bush exuded empathy. On Afghanistan, he talked about how both countries had been dragged into a place neither wants to be. On Cuba, he noted that Castro's efforts to spread revolution in Latin America are a drag on U.S.-Soviet relations. He asked Gorbachev to do what he can to restrain Castro. But he didn't demand it—or a cutoff of Soviet aid to Cuba—for fear of upsetting the subtle chemistry of the summit and distracting from the big issue, Germany. "If Germany is the size of a watermelon," a senior official says, "then what's the size of Cuba? Not very big."

Bush's reward (or at least what his aides characterize as one) came at the press conference. The night before at Camp David, he and Gorbachev went over what they would say in their opening statements. Bush gave Gorbachev a text in which he declared that both agreed Germans would decide their "alliance membership." Gorbachev raised no objection. So Bush went ahead and said roughly that at the press conference. Later, White House officials complained the press didn't make enough of this.

Bush turned his charm machine to full throttle at Camp David. "He uses the same charm and thoughtfulness with Cabinet members and members of Congress," says an official who joined Bush and Gorbachev for dinner at Camp David. "It pays off. Bush is very conscious of this. And he enjoys it." When Quayle, Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, and General Colin Powell arrived for dinner at Aspen Lodge, they knew immediately that Bush's efforts were bearing fruit. Gorbachev had taken off his tie and was wearing a sweater. He seemed relaxed. Over cocktails, he made small talk with Bush and everyone else from the administration.

After dinner, Bush and Gorbachev traded toasts. Bush concluded his with a serious-sounding spiel about his competitiveness at sports. "I like to win," he said. Bush lamented that Gorbachev had excelled at horseshoes, one of Bush's favorite sports. Then he pulled a wooden plaque with a horseshoe on it from under the table. It was the first horseshoe Gorbachev had thrown—a ringer. Gorbachev wasn't fooled by Bush's mock seriousness. He started grinning the moment Bush mentioned sports. He played along and, from all appearances, loved every second of it. •

The permanent summit.

THE MOSCOW PRIMARY

By Sidney Blumenthal

Just about the moment Mikhail Gorbachev flew over Newfoundland on his way to the summit, his storyline changed before his eyes. He was transformed from the Man of the Decade to the Man Who Lost an Empire. Pictures of chaos filled the television screens and the pages of the newsweeklies. Panic buying in Moscow and bloviations by Boris Yeltsin raised the pitch to near-hysterical. One after another, the anchormen and the networks' solemn correspondents, employing the conventions of horse-race political journalism, pronounced Gorbachev weak and unpopular, and George Bush strong. When an earthquake struck Romania, which rattled some windows across the border, that too was described on the television news as rattling a fragile Gorbachev.

The montage of disorder was a compelling but un-

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conscious broadcast of the materialist conception of history, the fatalistic belief that "objective conditions" determine events. Unintentionally, the networks reproduced the worldview of the Soviet conservatives. All that was absent from these early atmospherics was the factor of Gorbachev himself, who had set in motion the rumbles and fissures.

The summit, of course, could not resolve the myriad problems that beset him; nor was it designed to achieve the final settlement of Europe. It did both less and more than that.

The notion of the summit itself is a leftover from the cold war, conceived by Winston Churchill as a heroic effort to break the deadlock of the superpowers, who alone were granted the nuclear dispensation. The summit now is not the summit of the Himalayas, but of the Catoctins. Arms control, the old agenda (the fate of the earth, etc.), had become a secondary story. But the pressing issue was not what was in open dispute: whether a united Germany will belong to NATO, the cold war alliance that Bush himself acknowledged had fulfilled its original purpose. The unavoidable but unaddressed question was the place of the Soviet Union in Europe—not how to keep it out (another wrinkle in containment), but how to draw it in.

The summit was one event in a stream of events, not a classical drama. It focused on the relationship of the two presidents more than it resolved issues in the game of nations. Bush is the second American president in the age of Gorbachev. In this summit, after elaborate fits and starts in his first year due to a steadfast refusal to grasp that the cold war was indeed ending, Bush finally became fully engaged with Gorbachev. The Malta summit was merely a prelude to the full-blown relationship, an abbreviated, storm-tossed meeting, following the fall of the Berlin Wall by less than a month. Now the impact of the epochal shift was being absorbed.

Both presidents operated on the same principle: the primacy of foreign policy in politics. The summit found Gorbachev in the middle of his complications. He had done what all previous Soviet leaders have failed to do, but which they declared as their utopian aim: he had created a new Soviet man. These creatures are the young, radical deputies and new mayors of Moscow and Leningrad, who know how to maneuver in democratic politics, to thrive in public debate, and who are Gorbachev's only really viable alternatives. When he first burst on the scene, Gorbachev seemed immaculately conceived, a historical miracle, though he was very much part of a certain political generation. He may still be a singularity, but his tasks are different because of the changes he has wrought. His ability to issue ukases is neither what it was nor what he wants. He has lost an ironclad authority in the search to establish a new legitimacy.

"The most dangerous time for a bad government is when it starts to reform itself," wrote Tocqueville. Is Gorbachev a Tocquevillean reformer, who unleashes forces that will consume him, or a Rooseveltian reformer, who masters the new circumstances? Contrary to the play composed for him by most of the network commentators, Gorbachev was not about to be written off. He was hardly an enfeebled figure, bowed by his troubles. Though he sometimes rambled and seemed to ruminate aloud as if it were the analytic hour, he was always in command of himself. Time and again, he displayed his self-confidence. After casually tossing a ringer at George Bush's fabled horseshoe pit, he remarked, "But just remember this. I got a ringer on my first try, so I'm a pretty good shot." It was easy for him to wave away the vapors of doom. "I'm not on the ropes," he said, as if the idea were ridiculous.

By asserting his own interpretation of the turmoil in Soviet society, he recast the disorder as part of a pattern he has had in mind. "Hence," he said, "the question of, 'How long will Gorbachev stay in his office?' and 'How will this whole perestroika end?' and so on and so forth, even this, I think fits in this process of profound change. And perhaps this is something we cannot do without. But the most important thing is that everything that is happening confirms not only the fact that we're cleaning up our courtyard, we're really revamping our entire society." This was only one among many such statements he made.

The events that Gorbachev had set loose were the main reason that President Bush stood at an astronomical level of popularity. Indeed, the day after the summit began, his positive rating on handling the economy fell to 34 percent and his negative rose to 45 percent, while 59 percent believed the economy was worsening, according to a Hotline-KRC poll. For Bush, like Gorbachev, the primacy of foreign policy had been essential in raising him above domestic anxieties. But the summit storyline was all about Gorbachev. There were few pieces about Bush's political context. His rhetorical style, a series of bullets, dingbats, and name cards, defeats attempts to construct a narrative around him. He deflects more than narrative; he often rejects syntax. "I don't want to make the wrong mistake," he had said, quoting Yogi Berra, in explaining his motives. In his greetings to Gorbachev, who had briefly alluded to a cosmic realignment, Bush modestly defined his goal as making the world "a little bit better." He also sought to use the summit to insulate himself from political conflict at home, to fend off change.

And yet he had jettisoned virtually all the Reagan themes of rallying around past greatness, the remnants of the 1980s. Bush's strategy was not to sound the bugles. He was extremely careful not to sound triumphant. His muteness was an effort to allow Gorbachev to depict the fall of communism in Central Europe in a positive light to the Soviet public.

Three of Gorbachev's meetings with representative groups worked to Bush's political advantage, undermining his adversaries—and pushing Bush himself further away from the politics of the 1980s. They also fit Bush's preferred style—a surrogate performing in public, protecting him from explaining himself and thereby avoiding a potentially messy encounter.

The first such Gorbachev meeting was with congres-

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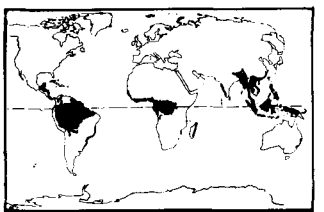

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sional leaders, who were deprived of their usual pretense of secret knowledge by the presence of CNN's cameras. Instead of coming out of the room afterward and inflating themselves as statesmen, they played shrunken versions of themselves. They were looking to embarrass Gorbachev and Bush, if not in order to preserve the cold war, then at least to continue the posturing associated with it. The Democrats, especially, appeared like the Republicans of 1946, unwilling, because of deep-seated, self-defeating habits of mind, to engage new realities. In trying to use Gorbachev as a foil, they were outmatched. "We didn't just change the paint on the walls," Gorbachev told them. "We took down the walls." His filibustering deprived them of what they came for—the sound bite.

The second politically significant meeting was with the corporate titans in Minneapolis. There, and in San Francisco, Gorbachev enlisted in his cause—the cause of capital—the big business class at the core of the Republican Party. Bush by himself could not have done more to isolate within the party his conservative critics, whose base is increasingly restricted to the op-ed pages and Washington talk shows.

The third crucial meeting was with Ronald Reagan, whose power once seemed eternal but who has become a fading memory. Reagan had already ridden into the sunset, so Gorbachev went to the sunset to see him. On the horizon, the Golden Gate Bridge served as a background prop. Reagan's powerful mythology had been built on nostalgia for a lost America that existed more on the backlot than anyplace else. The positive glow surrounding Reagan upon leaving the White House had required the entrance of the startlingly unexpected figure of Gorbachev. Now Reagan was wistful about how they had ended the cold war together—a buddy movie. He was loyal to his last reel, which was Bush's trailer.

By contrast with his predecessor, Bush, in the summit press conferences, seemed more open, less rehearsed, more in control of his material, but more opaque. Reagan, trained for the horse opera, possessed a talent for the popular idiom. Bush had been schooled in the careful and cautious language of inherited privilege, a language intended to conceal, blur, and mask differences with manners. Partly because of Bush's nature, Gorbachev may have made a more intense, deeper impression on the American imagination. When Gorbachev traveled out into the country he provoked a response that Bush never did—"the Rolling Perestroika Victory Tour," Dan Rather dubbed it. Gorbachev, in fact, is the first Soviet leader to play effectively on American public opinion. His base may be independent of any American president, no matter how popular.

For Bush, summitry is a long Moscow primary. Like Gorbachev, he must sustain domestic support. Almost certainly, when the controlled images at the Republican convention of 1992 begin to flicker, Gorbachev's picture will be more prominent than Dan Quayle's. Gorbachev is Bush's true running mate. When Bush and Gorbachev agreed to a schedule of regular, frequent summits, they institutionalized the primacy of foreign policy. The permanent summit is now at the heart of Bush's permanent campaign. The summits may constantly reinforce Bush's popularity. But they may also reinforce the idea of change, Gorbachev's theme. "We've moved towards a—I don't quite know how to quantify it for you," Bush said about the U.S.-Soviet relationship.

His themeless presidency may have inadvertently landed on a theme. The president of the "status quo plus," in spite of himself, is slowly helping to bring change, at least to the Old World. •

BOPHUTHATSWANA POSTCARD

SHANTYLAND

By Jacob Weisberg

THABU NCHU, BOPHUTHATSWANA

The Naledi Sun is a scaled-down version of Sun City, the massive pleasure palace built to lure tourists to the independent homeland of Bophuthatswana. Like its infamous and more successful cousin, this spanking new hotel nests in the hollowed-out pocket of an extensive rural slum. Sprawling just behind its pink concrete fence is one of the more horrifying tenements in South Africa. You could stay here and miss it. The shanties have been bulldozed back so they can't be seen from poolside.

Inside the casino on a typical weekday evening, white farmers from across the invisible border of South Africa proper drink beer from plastic cups and pump coins into clanging slot machines. A few cruise the bar, where black prostitutes sit alone at tables. In the adjoining disco, there are only blacks, waiting in line for admission to the final round of the "Miss Naledi beauty contest." Music throbs, lights flash, and security guards hustle the beauties through the casino. Rounding out the weirdness and unpleasantness of the whole scene is the spectral presence of President Lucas Mangope, instantly recognizable by his heraldic orange sash, staring down from a picture frame on the far wall.

The grotesque coexistence of this kitschy splendor with squalid poverty has characterized South Africa's bantustans since the first of them, Transkei, was made "independent" in 1976. The original idea behind the National Party's homelands policy was to reduce the black population of white South Africa by creating ten distinct tribal enclaves destined for independence. In practice, it meant the forced relocation of millions of people, often to remote, barren areas they had never seen before. Governance was entrusted to corrupt chieftains, who flourished under

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massive financial support from Pretoria.

Though overshadowed by the dramatic changes occurring at the national level, the plight of these rural reservations, where half of South Africa's 27 million blacks live, has worsened dramatically in recent months. Lennox Sebe, Ciskei's President for Life, was deposed in March, and a coup brought down the Venda government in April. All of the homelands are in a state of ferment. Though several of the regimes are now sympathetic to the ANC, others, including Mangope's, are loath to give up their lucrative commissions. Realizing that their days are numbered, the doomed dictators have become increasingly ruthless in their attempts to hold on to power. In terms of political repression as well as material misery, these fiefdoms far outstrip the worst that white-ruled South Africa has to offer.

Mangope's Bophuthatswana is undoubtedly the most miserable of the lot. In the checkerboard state, which consists of some nineteen fragments of land separated by white farms, independent political and civic associations are forbidden. Having been deprived of their South African citizenship at the time of independence in 1977, Bophuthatswana's residents hang in a peculiar limbo. They are citizens of a phony country that is not recognized by anyone other than South Africa. The ANC and other political parties—now operating freely in the rest of the country—are still banned. Visitors search in vain for any manifestation of opposition to either de Klerk or Mangope. After violent protests in February demanding reincorporation into South Africa, which were put down by Bophuthatswana police aided by South African troops, Mangope declared a state of emergency, under which individuals can be deported or detained indefinitely for displaying political symbols. He maintains that his homeland will remain independent for 100 years.

Stirrings that have occurred, including a coup attempt in 1988, have been ruthlessly quashed. In February students from a Thaba Nchu high school gathered in the town center to protest having to pay for their own schoolbooks. Bophuthatswana police fell upon them with *sjamboks*, long bullwhips, and beat them brutally. Three months later 138 children, some of them as young as fourteen, were still being held in the Bophuthatswana police station; no charges had been brought against them. Anthony Mfila, the local field worker for the relief organization Operation Hunger, who showed me around, explained: "There is no politics in Thaba Nchu. No unions, no gatherings, no parties, no newspapers. People are afraid to say anything against the government."

Our tour began at the shack settlement near the hotel. Here families of eight and ten sleep on the floors of shacks made out of packed mud and corrugated zinc. Several of the hovels lay broken in heaps, having collapsed in the recent rains. There are no toilets and no electricity. A few taps supply water to several thousand people.

As we drove through, children ran after our truck shouting, "China." Mfila explained that the only white faces they ever see are those of the Taiwanese factory owners drawn to Bophuthatswana by its large pool of cheap, non-union labor. The kids thought I was one of the Chinese. After gambling, the clothing mills are Bophuthatswana's major industry. Thousands of families have been forcibly removed from Thaba Nchu over the past ten years to make room for them. The wages are as low as 38 rands ($15) a fortnight, for shifts lasting twelve hours. But despite the dismal terms of service, small groups of men walk up and down the factory street, the only paved one around, pleading for any work at all.

With unemployment running between 40 percent and 50 percent, many men have left for the big cities in search of work, often leaving behind large families without any means of support. Starvation is common here. For many, Operation Hunger's sewing groups, carpentry workshops, and communal gardens are the only means of economic survival. Because they are the only forms of independent community activity tolerated by the authorities, these projects also serve as a surrogate political structure.

Our first stop was one of Mfila's vegetable patches. Although it was too muddy for gardening, several old women were out tending their squash, beetroot, spinach, carrots, and corn anyway. The soil is of poor quality, but thanks to the addition of a well, the plot produces enough food to feed fifty families. Last year proceeds from the garden were enough to pay for some tools and provide a small amount of leftover cash at Christmas. As we walked around the garden, a ragged man approached, obviously distraught. He told Mfila that his eleven-year-old daughter had disappeared. Mfila said he would check the morgue and make inquiries, but he wasn't hopeful. Child-stealing occurs frequently here. The children are often found dead, or never found at all.

A thirty-mile drive over rutted roads brought us to the village of Moroto, which means "urine" in Tswana. The thirty-five families who live here were deported from Thaba Nchu to make room for the Taiwanese factories. They have no means of support and are totally isolated. Nothing happens here. A bus comes once a week. Children do not go to school. The men sit around swatting flies and drinking *umqombothi*, a homemade beer made from corn and sorghum. A conversation with a few of them revealed that they didn't know who Nelson Mandela is. They had heard of Lucas Mangope but weren't interested in talking about him.

People were starving here before Operation Hunger arrived in 1988, bringing supplies of soup and organizing a vegetable garden. "They didn't know you could grow spinach," Mfila says. "They thought you had to buy it in a shop." The situation is still desperate. The dam that is the only source for water is used as a toilet. The local chief, who works for the government, had demanded the right to supervise the garden and distribute the food himself. Mfila refused, and with the village

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supporting him, appeared to be winning.

We drove on to Botshabelo, an enormous township not far from Thaba Nchu. Botshabelo came into being as a byproduct of Bophuthatswanan independence. Forty thousand Sothos living around Thaba Nchu were deported to Botshabelo to foster an ethnically pure Tswana district. The Pretoria government once intended to attach Botshabelo to the Sotho homeland of QwaQwa, but the area's population mushroomed, and the plan was suspended. Ten years later the slum has 800,000 or more inhabitants. People have flooded in from several homelands, desperate for jobs in nearby Bloemfontein. As in Thaba Nchu, clothing manufacturers from Taiwan, as well as from Israel, Hong Kong, and South Africa itself, have been lured by government subsidies and the promise of cheap, non-union labor in the overcrowded resettlement area.

Mfila has started a number of projects here: auto repair, sewing, and carpentry groups. But today most of the members are unable to work. Their electrical supply has been cut off by the manager of the site, which belongs to the South African government's Manpower program, a job training scheme for unskilled black workers. The women keep busy sewing quilts and dresses by hand, but the furniture makers and mechanics cannot perform their tasks without electricity. They stand around, waiting.

Mfila and I went to talk with the recently appointed manager of the center, an American named Daniel Quinn. He complained about being overburdened with trainees. Mfila insisted that he turn the electricity back on and requested a toilet for the women in the sewing group. Quinn, radiating hostility, said Mfila had no permission to use electricity even if he paid for it. "Quit acting white," Mfila retorted. "The project belongs to the people, not to your center." After we left, Mfila explained that Quinn cut the electricity on his own initiative because he wants Operation Hunger off the site, even though the organization has obtained legal permission to use it. Mfila says that Quinn regards a black authority figure as a challenge to his power over workers at the center.

Our last stop was a place called Tent City, a camp of 175 Sotho families whose town was left dangling between the homelands of Transkei and QwaQwa. Unwilling to accept independence, they moved to Botshabelo in 1984 and set up tents on a corner of unoccupied land. Though the South African government threatens to evict them, they have been squatting ever since, without any sanitary facilities or infrastructure. Their tents, which house families of ten and twelve, are in tatters. The group's leader said he didn't think it could survive another winter.

Tent City presents the homelands disaster in its starkest form. The National Party's policy forced millions of tribal blacks from their homes and relocated them arbitrarily amid conditions of nearly genocidal poverty. It stripped them of citizenship, of rights, and in its drive to create ethnically homogeneous reserves, pitted against each other groups that had coexisted peacefully. Finally, it fobbed the whole mess off onto corrupt quislings, some of whom, like Mangope, aren't willing to relinquish power without a struggle. Despite his efforts at reform elsewhere, F. W. de Klerk has given no indication what, if anything, he plans to do about the homelands. He calls the question of whether they should be reincorporated "an interesting debate." De Klerk is leading his party away from the apartheid vision of ethnic purity that provided the rationale for the system. But he continues to neglect the wreckage that remains. •

No more jungle-busting roads.

AMAZON GRACE

By Bruce Babbitt

Last October the Inter-American Development Bank voted to lend $58.7 million to Brazil for the clearing and burning of the Amazon rain forest. The weapon of destruction is a road called BR 364, which will slice open yet another vast undisturbed region for land speculators and ranchers who will drive out the Indians, set fire to the forest, and bring in cattle to graze ruined pasture lands. A third of the loans that finance this project comes from American taxpayers.

To justify the loans and quiet the critics, the Bank issued a lengthy press release explaining that Brazil has pledged in writing to establish and maintain parks, forest reserves, and Indian reservations within the areas to be opened by the road. History, however, argues against the Bank's optimism; in the past twenty years, 15 percent of the Amazon forest has been cleared and burned, Indian tribes driven to the edge of extinction, and thousands of species lost forever.

The lockstep progression of Amazon road-building and forest destruction goes back to 1970, when Brazil decided to develop the Amazon as an agricultural frontier modeled on the experience of Iowa and Nebraska. Enact a homestead law, provide free land to settlers, open the territory with roads, and the blessings of civilization would soon follow.

What actually followed was one disaster after another. Settlers learned the hard way what scientists had predicted but politicians refused to acknowledge: most Amazon soils cannot support sustained agriculture. Disillusioned settlers abandoned their lands. Ranchers moved in to graze cattle on the remnants until the laws of Amazon soil chemistry forced them to abandon exhausted lands and move on, repeating the process by clearing and burning still more forest.

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By 1980 the Brazilian enthusiasm for large road projects began to cool. Besieged by negative world opinion, mired in international debt, and verging on bankruptcy, the government abandoned, at least for the time, most of the grandiose projects. But officials always made one exception. They intended to press forward with BR 364, whatever the environmental costs.

The construction of BR 364 has become a Brazilian obsession, and it is not difficult to understand why. If the road is an environmentalist's nightmare, it is a politician's dream: a road of national destiny, a modern Oregon trail, the path to national integration. The highway starts in Cuiaba, in central Brazil, and goes northward parallel to the Bolivian border for nearly a thousand miles to Puerto Velho, an old river port in the state of Rondonia. It then runs westward across Rondonia toward another river city, Rio Branco, the capital of the state of Acre. As planned, the third and final segment will cross the virgin forests of Acre to end at the Peruvian border, nearly within sight of the foothills of the Andes. From there BR 364 could connect to Peruvian roads across the Andes to the Pacific seaports, providing Brazil a gateway to Asia and a Japanese market for the valuable hardwoods of the Amazon.

MAP BY ALLEN CARROLL FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

When Brazil approached the World Bank for help to keep the BR 364 dream alive, it found a sympathetic lender. By then the World Bank, awakening to environmental objections, had redlined most of the Amazon road projects. But it made an exception for BR 364 because it wanted to demonstrate that at least one development road could be built without bringing on environmental devastation. The World Bank sent anthropologists into the Mato Grosso wilderness to locate Indian tribes and prepare plans for their protection. It then agreed to advance $350 million to build the first segment from Cuiaba to Puerto Velho. As advised by its environmental consultants, the World Bank attached conditions requiring the demarcation of Indian reservations and the establishment of forest reserves.

The result was a world-class catastrophe. The Brazilian Indian agency, FUNAI, entrusted with protection of the Indians, proved just as incompetent as our own Bureau of Indian Affairs, and a lot more crooked. As the road progressed through the Guapore Valley, the Nambiquara tribe was driven from the land, often with the connivance of corrupt officials. Some tribes were decimated by measles and other newly introduced diseases. Reservations were established, only to be rescinded as squatters crowded in. Around the world "Rondonia" became synonymous with satellite pictures of a thousand fires burning in the night, pouring carbon dioxide into the Earth's atmosphere.

By the time the road reached Puerto Velho, the World Bank was coming under scrutiny not only from environmentalists, but also from members of Congress with jurisdiction over World Bank appropriations. At that point it retreated and handed over the next leg of the project to a sister agency, the Inter-American Bank. And in 1985 that bank approved loans totaling $58.7 million to construct the second stage of the road from Rondonia into Acre. Once again all the usual environmental conditions were attached, and once again they were ignored as bulldozers crashed through the jungle.

Then in 1986 at a meeting in Brasília, a field representative of the Environmental Defense Fund met an unknown rubber tapper and peasant leader from Acre named Chico Mendes. It was a serendipitous encounter that united root and branch of a gathering international protest movement. International environmental organizations found a Brazilian grass-roots connection, just as Mendes and the forest people of Acre discovered a sympathetic world audience. As Mendes recalled, "All along we were environmentalists without even knowing the word."

Several months later American environmentalists brought Mendes to Miami to show Inter-American Bank directors the blood on their hands, accumulated as their road-building loans destroyed both the forests and the lives and livelihood of the rubber tappers. Mendes was soon joined by the leaders of an emerging Indian movement, and within weeks the Bank ran up the white flag, announcing that funding for BR 364 would be suspended until meaningful controls could be implemented.

For the next two years Bank officials made direct contact and worked with the Indian leaders and rubber tappers of Acre. The result was a detailed plan to designate nearly 30 percent of the entire state as reserves to protect the Indians, rubber tappers, and forests of Acre. Brazilian officials took preliminary steps to implement the plan by expropriating land to set aside reserves for rubber tappers. The demands of Acre's Indian tribes were largely met by the creation of Indian reservations covering about 5 percent of the state.

Satisfied with this plan, the Bank reinstated the loans at its October 1989 meeting. Construction is once again under way, and the road will reach Rio Branco before the end of 1990. Then the final battle will be joined: whether to build BR 364 westward across Acre,

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Rain forest chic

Beneath the shade of a huge kapok tree two Indians and a Midwesterner sit cross-legged on grass mats. The place is a back yard in São Paulo, and the subject is nuts: supply, demand, rancidity, oil content, breakage, vacuum packing, and the innumerable intricacies of getting them out of the jungle and onto the shelves of boutiques and supermarkets in the West. The conversers are Ailton Krenak, leader of UNI, Brazil's largest Indian organization; Itabira Surui, an Indian whose people are trying to make a living from the rain forest; and Jason Clay, a Harvard University-based anthropologist and research director of Cultural Survival, which funds projects designed and run by indigenous peoples.

Several months earlier Clay was sitting by a heated pool in Vermont talking nuts with Ben Cohen, of Ben and Jerry's Homemade, Inc. The subject was Rainforest Crunch, a Brazil nut and cashew brittle sold both as a candy and an ice cream mix-in, which hit store shelves last fall. Marketed to gourmet palates wanting to save the rain forest as they snack, Rainforest Crunch has been selling faster than it can be produced.

What brings together Indians deep in the Amazon with New Age entrepreneurs is Cultural Survival's rain forest marketing project. Developed by Clay a year ago to thwart the Amazonian land grab by ranchers and loggers, whose burning and clearing of forest for pasture has been the region's greatest single cause of deforestation, the venture aims to strengthen the economic clout of those most threatened by deforestation: forest dwellers themselves. The plan is to buy forest products directly from Brazilian cooperatives of Indians and rubber tappers, thereby eliminating middlemen who often make extortionary profits. Clay believes that the government will realize the economic value of a living forest and be compelled to set policy accordingly, reversing the trend.

Most of the Amazon's gatherers now get four cents a pound for Brazil nuts—a minuscule 2 percent of the New York wholesale price. Middlemen often pay them not in cash but in food marked up as much as 1,000 percent. The gatherers who are already organized in cooperatives (a tiny fraction of the Amazon's estimated 1 million to 2 million gatherers) have begun to sell directly to the shelling factory and have seen their profits jump three to four times. By processing the nuts themselves, they stand to gain fifteen times as much. Their first factory, financed by Cultural Survival, started shelling nuts for export in early June.

Rain forest cachet is helping to make the whole thing possible. Cohen, who anticipates more than $2 million in sales for 1990, says Rainforest Crunch is a big seller not only because it tastes good, but because "it gives people a moral reason to munch." He has promised 40 percent of pre-tax Crunch profits for rain forest projects.

Another fifty companies are looking into the more than 300 sample products—fruits, oils, resins, flours, pigments—that Clay has brought back from the Amazon. The Body Shop, the British-based cosmetic company whose products come with messages for social change, is experimenting with a rain forest line of beauty products. Loblaw International, one of the world's largest supermarket chains, is interested in adding rain forest products to its $21 million "ecologically friendly" Green Line. Demand is definitely up: Clay is scouring the Amazon to bring back 1,200 tons of nuts—$3.5 million worth—in 1990. Every pound he sells generates 10 percent to 15 percent profit, which Cultural Survival funnels back into projects in Brazil.

This all sounds like an ideal project for the '90s: shrewd entrepreneurship joined with ecological concerns and missionary zeal about the fate of indigenous peoples. But there are problems. Although the rubber tappers and gatherers have been organizing since the mid-1970s, their cooperatives have been plagued by illiteracy and lack of accounting skills. Gaining the basics of health care and education—let alone a fair price from the *patrón*—is very difficult. "You can't bring a group out of slavery and expect them suddenly to take charge of their own destinies," says Anthony Anderson, a program officer with the Ford Foundation in Brazil.

The 125 traditional Indian groups scattered throughout the Amazon are even less prepared. Cultural Survival wants to help some of these groups get their products internationally distributed. But some Indians have never even met a Westerner, let alone been introduced to the arcane mysteries of a world market.

Other complications exist. Marketing products from the rain forest depends on conditions most Western firms don't ordinarily confront, making it difficult to keep supply constant and quality consistent. For instance, it takes up to eighteen hours by mule from the tapper's forest hut to the nearest village.

And if the project is successful, what's to prevent large-scale businessmen from moving in and starting their own plantations? Plantation owners' lower operating costs would allow them to sell their nuts more cheaply, stealing the market from the forest dwellers. Clay is concerned but claims that diversifying products and increasing demand will protect small producers. But of the Amazon's estimated 5 million species of plants, animals, and insects, a fraction—perhaps 500 plants—have marketing potential. Opening markets hastily in areas with no extractive tradition could lead to a boom crop one year, a bust crop the next. And what happens when Clay gets tired of being the altruistic intermediary? If the rubber tappers can't organize themselves enough to become their own middlemen, they will have to deal with an outsider, who will likely take a larger cut of the final product.

Finally, there's the matter of government support for conservation. Before harvesting can expand, the Amazon's sustainably marketable species have to be identified, a time-consuming and expensive endeavor that will take government funds. Whether the new regime will fulfill its promises of support remains to be seen. Brazilian land law, meanwhile, provides incentives to keep up the pace of rain forest destruction. In contested title cases, the quickest way to make a claim stick is to show improvements to the land. Cutting down the forest, regardless of subsequent use, is considered an improvement.

ORNA FELDMAN

Orna Feldman is a writer living in Boston.

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linking it to Peruvian roads across the Andes to the Pacific.

In March, just before taking office, Brazil's new president, Fernando Collor, signaled a possible change of national policy by announcing the appointment of one of Brazil's foremost environmentalists as secretary of environment. The new secretary, José Lutzenberger, is an outspoken opponent of international financing for BR 364, and he has stated, "The only people really interested in that road are the Japanese wood industry. It would be disastrous for the Amazon."

Nonetheless, state and local leaders in Acre continue to agitate for the road to the Pacific. In an attempt to reach a workable compromise between the politicians and the environmental opposition, the governor, Flaviano Melo, has begun to work out a forest policy, called Projeto Acre, designed to control the forest destruction that accompanies road-building.

Projeto Acre calls for controlling forest destruction by zoning the entire state. Rather than establishing postage stamp reserves here and there on the map and allowing the rest of the forest to fall, an effective land use plan would direct settlement, limiting agriculture to appropriate areas and stopping the destruction of forests for pasture land. Melo has assembled a strong team of topographers, soil scientists, and foresters to identify appropriate, sustainable uses for each area of the state and to prepare maps and regulations to submit to the state assembly for enactment into law.

When I visited the Projeto Acre laboratory on the outskirts of Rio Branco, the planners were working with the fervor of a New Deal brain trust, and there is little doubt they intend to produce a pro-forest document. The director showed me figures demonstrating that the average return from ranching is $87 per hectare per year; the comparable return from renewable uses of the forest for rubber tapping, harvesting Brazil nuts, and selective logging is more than $200.

Zoning an entire state primarily for forest uses, thereby restricting the right of ranchers to destroy the forest, is not presently a popular idea in the Amazon. The prevailing view is voiced by another governor named Amazonino Mendes: his land use program consists of handing out thousands of free chain saws to peasants, urging them to get on with cutting down the forests before anyone can stop them.

Yet political attitudes are shifting, however slowly. Flaviano Melo is acting as if he really intends to expend the political capital necessary to translate Projeto Acre into an enforceable law. He has organized a grass-roots effort to sell the concept. Throughout Acre public offices are stocked with Projeto Acre brochures that picture an orange sun sinking over an unbroken expanse of green forest emblazoned with a single word, "Zoning." Even President Collor has begun to sound like a convert to the cause; he has recently ordered his Cabinet officials to produce a zoning map for the entire Amazon basin.

Quite apart from the fate of BR 364, Projeto Acre could mark a new beginning for Amazon forest policy. For if the Amazon states were to adopt effective land use plans that were in turn backed up by national legislation and effective enforcement, the result could be the beginnings of a national forest system, a process analogous to the evolutionary development of the National Forest Service in this country in the early twentieth century.

In the long run, however, even if the Bank should be vindicated in its conditional loan program and even if Projeto Acre succeeds, the question remains: Is all this road-building really necessary or desirable? If the development premise of the Amazon as a tropical version of Iowa and Nebraska won't work, why have roads at all? What the Amazon most needs is a new development model for those areas that have not yet been devastated by road-building. Nearly half the Amazon, including the true wet tropical forests upstream from Manaus in a wedge bounded on the north by the Rio Negro and on the south by Acre, is still untouched by roads.

The outlines of a development model for that region are already present in the history and geography of the region. For 400 years, clear up to 1970, the Amazon basin developed, albeit slowly, with no road at all. The great ocean river and its myriad tributaries provided maintenance-free avenues up from the Atlantic Ocean into the farthest reaches of the Amazon basin. In the last century the rubber boom reached into every corner of the Amazon through fleets of steamboats operating upriver from Manaus. Manaus itself, 1,500 miles from the Atlantic, grew to a city of a million people without a single external road connection. Today in every upriver Amazon city a visitor can see the strings of river barges that have replaced the steamers. And there is now regular airline service to every part of the Amazon.

In effect the Amazon evolved as a civilization of river cities while the forest remained safe from the plow and the torch, yet available for renewable uses such as fishing, rubber tapping, and selective logging in areas along the river banks. There is still time to acknowledge the mistake of road-building and place the remainder of the Amazon off-limits to regional highways. The absence of roads doesn't mean stunted growth. There is ample space for urban and industrial centers, for local agriculture in suitable areas, sustainable forest and river uses, and the development of localized mineral deposits—all without throwing open the entire jungle to destruction.

In the end, Brazilians will decide for themselves how to develop the Amazon. However, when other countries, including the United States, lend money to help finance development, they too are entitled to speak and be heard about how development is pursued. And from now on the message ought to be clear: no more jungle-busting roads.

BRUCE BABBITT, former governor of Arizona, travels occasionally in Brazil to write about Amazon development issues.

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The trials of freedom in Eastern Europe.

POST-TOTALITARIAN DEPRESSION

By Tzvetan Todorov

The political events that unfolded during 1989 in Eastern Europe can only be a source of joy to those who care deeply about the fate of these countries, and to all who cherish justice and freedom. Forty-five years of Communist oppression have ended, a dark page turned in the history of the world. The situation is not equally clear everywhere—Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia seem resolutely committed to the process of democratization, while in Romania and Bulgaria the Communists are still in power, if under another name. But all of these countries are moving in the same direction, and clearly this movement is preferable to what preceded it. The joy was surely even greater since the change took us by surprise. It was so long awaited we no longer believed in it; Communist totalitarianism seemed to have achieved a perfection of its kind, which should have assured its eternal survival.

We all rejoiced at the time, of course. (I was in New York when I heard of the fall of Todor Zhivkov; I got a telephone call from a friend in Toronto, who had learned about it from friends in Bulgaria and then called all his acquaintances likely to appreciate the news.) And yet at the end of several weeks I sensed that the feelings of joy were mingled with a certain melancholy—which had nothing to do with any nostalgia for totalitarianism. This melancholy was of a different kind from the one invoked by political commentaries or economic analyses; it was a matter of individual experience, a psychological process at once private and common.

The experience took different forms, depending on whether you lived in the East or the West. For those in the West, as Pascal Bruckner explains in a recent book, *La Mélancolie démocratique*, it was essentially confined to the disappearance of the enemy. Totalitarianism was an ideal foil for democracy, and its collapse created a feeling of emptiness. If you spend your life fighting one doctrine, or even just using it as a point of reference, its disappearance leaves you somewhat disoriented. And the democratic idea loses much of its pugnacity. The nationals of the Eastern countries experience the same thing in a slightly different way, and it is this variant of the experience that I would like to describe here, even if I, personally, continue to vacillate between the two attitudes.

I must say straight away that for those whose reaction I am trying to articulate, post-totalitarian depression does not originate in the infatuation with material goods that ran rampant after the borders were opened. Several German intellectuals and politicians had hard words for their fellow citizens who flung themselves on the West German shops as soon as they could. To believe this version, civic virtues were pushed aside by a vote in favor of the banana (Otto Schily), moral integrity was drowned in chocolate, and the aspiration to freedom transformed the recently oppressed masses into a "furious horde advancing in ordered ranks toward the flashy knickknacks" of the shops in the West (Stephen Heym). These could only be the words of people who have forgotten, or never knew, the personal humiliation inflicted by the permanent lack of the most elementary consumer goods: the humiliation of silent and hostile lines, the humiliation inflicted on you by salespeople who seem angry to see you standing there, the humiliation of always having to buy what there is, not what you need. The systematic penury of material goods strikes a blow at the moral dignity of the individual. By throwing themselves on the shops of the West, the inhabitants of the East are not so much thinking of filling their stomachs as they are enjoying a freedom that the Western consumer does not feel because he is so accustomed to it.

The melancholy I am speaking of has its roots elsewhere, not in a sense of shame at present reactions but in an anxiety at the prospect of the near future, and in the difficulty of absorbing the immediate past. The morning after the Second World War, the gates of the concentration camps were opened to let out the few remaining survivors. Returning home, those survivors could not help seeking some sort of compensation for their inhuman sufferings. So that their experience of pain should not be wholly in vain, they hoped, often unwittingly, to become the objects of love and admiration, and they counted on finding a world rid of its worst faults, a kinder and fairer world. And it didn't happen. Their own families had been dispersed and annihilated, or had forgotten them, and no one wanted to linger in the company of these somber witnesses to human dishonor. As for postwar political passions and social struggles, they surely didn't equal the fascist paroxysm, but neither were they governed by love and justice. War and violence had not disappeared from the face of the earth to compensate for the suffering of the survivors.

The morning after the collapse of Communist totalitarianism, the gates have opened to those societies that were camps of a sort as well, clearly less harrowing but of infinitely greater dimensions. And the survivors would like to find a just and harmonious world around them; this is an irrational hope, but one they cannot help feeling. So what do they discover? Communist ideology made all other ideologies inadmissible in these countries; but when they were allowed to resurface, they were sanctified by their opposition to communism—as witness nationalism (which could fuel conflicts in this part of the world for 2,000 years to come, so diverse are the populations living in each other's midst) and its inevitable consequence, xenophobia; racism (massively present against Vietnamese immigrant work-

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ers and African students); and religious fanaticism (the pope is a poor symbol of democracy).

On the individual level, things are not much better. When the corrupt, Party-imposed rulers are sent packing, who takes their place? Those most avid for power. In return, those who were formerly marginalized by the force of repression are still marginal today because they are loath to throw themselves into a dubious competition. On a visit to Prague I waited in vain to see someone who supported the old system; I found only opponents. Where were they a year ago? (Charter 77 never surpassed 2,000 signatures; true, a call to freedom of religious observance received 700,000.) In Bulgaria the same thing happened in 1944: suddenly everyone was anti-fascist. There are exceptions, to be sure, but in general the new actors on the political stage do not inspire unqualified admiration.

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Anxieties surface as well over the future role of morality. Perhaps this requires some explanation. It is true, first of all, that totalitarian regimes are hardly conducive to a general flowering of moral virtue; this is, indeed, one of the most seriously damaging effects we can accuse such regimes of having on the individual conscience. Every person becomes a hypocrite and cynic, an egotist and a materialist (in the vulgar rather than the philosophical sense of the term). Adapting, maneuvering, keeping well out of it seem to be the only ways left to the individual.

In the midst of this moral desert, however, a miracle was worked. One, then two, then a hundred individuals decided to resist. And conscious that all political or military resistance would be instantly crushed by the superior power of the regime, they opted for moral resistance (improperly called "dissidence"). They confined themselves to extremely simple moral acts: telling the truth (truth in itself is not a moral value, but to tell it in all circumstances is one of the highest) and helping the persecuted. But "simple" does not mean "facile." These moral acts demand a great effort of will, for you first have to transform what seemed to be a chain of perfectly automatic and natural gestures into a situation of choice, and then confront not an adversary-ideologue who agrees to meet you on the same ground, but indifferent bureaucrats and obtuse police. These simple acts revealed themselves to have unsuspected force; and unlike the old Bolsheviks who were victims of the Moscow trials, the dissidents could not be employed by totalitarianism. No one contributed as much within those countries to the fall of communism as those lowly individuals, Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov, Kuron and Michnik, Patočka and Havel. They were very few in number, but their example was decisive since they offered everyone a standard for measuring good and evil.

In a totalitarian situation, the moral attitude was the best form of political action. But that is no longer the case. Other ways to politics are open today. Now you can take power, but to do that you have to organize into parties, seduce voters, and finally win elections. Czechoslovakia again offers a telling example. Until the November revolution, Vaclav Havel denied any aspiration to power and wanted to retain the role of intellectual critic. Since that time, Charter 77 has had to give birth to the Civic Forum, and today the Forum has become a party running candidates for election. Now, moral rectitude is not an indispensable quality for winning votes. What is required is competence and effectiveness; people want to be seduced and reassured. In a democratic regime, morality cannot be a substitute for politics; in the best case, it helps to orient or contain it. Democracy does not prevent you from becoming a moral being, but neither does it incite you to do so. Totalitarianism directly destroys the moral virtues, but it also creates them in its opponents, since they are the best weapons against it.

Vesko, a Bulgarian friend of mine, tells me that today he feels like a character from Maupassant's story "The Necklace." A young woman of modest means borrows a necklace of precious stones from her rich employer to

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wear at a dance, and the necklace is stolen. The woman makes it a point of honor to restore the jewels: she borrows a huge sum of money to buy an identical necklace. The rest of her life is spent repaying the debt. Many years later, in her declining years, she meets her former employer and proudly tells her what happened. "My poor friend," the employer exclaims, "the stones were false, and the necklace was worthless."

The morning after the collapse of totalitarianism, the Eastern Europeans must not only accept a future that is not entirely rosy, but they must also settle accounts with the past. As long as they thought they were faced with an inescapable force, suffering itself had some meaning. From the day it was declared, according to a current witticism more tragic than it seems, that communism is a tortuous road leading from capitalism to capitalism, this former life has seemed senseless. They fought against (or more often were hurt by) windmills, they paid for a fake necklace. I am speaking, of course, of people who've reached a certain age; those in their thirties today will quickly forget and build another life for themselves. But what about that Czech intellectual who signed the Charter in 1977 and spent the following dozen years doing road work as a maneuver? Today he is "rehabilitated," but he has also reached the age of retirement. Lost possibilities will never return. Or what about that man who spent fifteen, or thirty, or forty-five years adapting, always trying to keep the greater part of himself intact? What good will all his accumulated ruses do him, all his subtle savoir faire? In a historical perspective, these little dramas are unimportant; in an individual life, they weigh heavily. Fifteen years is a very long time.

But this is not only a matter of the void created by the disappearance of the enemy. The characteristic of totalitarianism, as Havel has shown, is to make everyone within the country an accomplice of its smooth functioning. The border does not run, as in classical dictatorships, between the oppressors in power and the oppressed people, but within every individual, including members of the Central Committee. With one part of my being I submit to the system, and I suffer from it; with another part I help it work. "Everyone is at once a prisoner and a guard." That is true even for people who in principle marginalize themselves. In effect, all those who do not feel they have the soul of a hero or a martyr but disapprove of the regime take refuge in a kind of social schizophrenia. In public they pretend to approve the words of official orders and display docility; in private they all agree to denounce the same words and merely try to hold their heads up. But this public behavior of silent submission is precisely the ballast of totalitarianism: having accepted "life-as-a-lie" (another of Havel's expressions), one becomes an accomplice. Therein lies the "autototalitarianism of society."

Totalitarianism would not have held on as long as it did or swept so many individuals along in its wake if it were as alien to ordinary human aspirations as we would like to believe today. What are its secret attractions? Communist ideology holds up the image of a better society and incites us to aspire to it. Isn't the desire to transform the world in the name of an ideal an integral part of human identity? At the same time, in such societies the law of survival of the fittest reigns supreme, and the values of "life" are thus confirmed. In other words, the world of imagination and the world of everyday reality are at odds. But this helps; one compensates on one level for the disappointments experienced on the other.

In addition, Communist society strips the individual of his responsibilities—"they" always make the decisions; but responsibility is often a heavy burden to bear. Don't we all secretly dream, at certain times in our lives, of becoming children again and letting our parents make the decisions? The prisoner has his happiness and the freed man has his anguish. *Homo sovieticus* identifies automatically with any affirmation of authority, and he is reassured by it; but this reaction is not unfamiliar to the rest of us. That is why there was something misleading in the expression "evil empire" as applied to the USSR, even if, compared with democracy, totalitarianism is unquestionably an evil. That expression allowed evil to be confined to a place and a government, as if it were entirely alien to us, "we" being the incarnation of the good.

The problem posed by general participation in the totalitarian system is not entirely new either. It was Nazi Germany's problem the day after the Second World War. How do you de-Nazify a country in which everyone, or nearly everyone, acquiesced to Nazism? Where do you find judges, engineers, administrators, professors who had not participated, more or less, in the old power structure? How do you overcome inexpiable guilt without falling into the still greater deformation of willful repression? Today a great part of the ex-Eastern European population finds itself faced with the same question. Some—often the least compromised—savagely reproach themselves. Others—in general those who have a particularly heavy conscience—castigate the past weaknesses of their fellow citizens and call for vengeance. And many others decide that they are going to forget everything, or even that they never knew anything, so as to continue to live without uselessly torturing themselves. After all, who doesn't have something to reproach himself for, if only small acts of cowardice, too many moments of acquiescence, guilty indifference?

The solution to this problem in Germany took a whole generation. People will tell me today, too, that the depression I'm speaking of is an understandable but transitory reaction, that these difficulties will pass, and that even so, it is all for the best. That is true. But it is also true that meanwhile life is passing by too.

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Phenomena

Writing in 1897 about a London theater to which he was partial, Bernard Shaw said: "The secret of the Adelphi is . . . simply good acting and plenty of it. And, unlike most critics, I am fond of acting." I certainly share Shaw's fondness, and I thought of his remark when I wrote about Armand Assante's fiery performance in *Q&A*. I realized that, though hardly for the first time, lately I've been writing about good acting quite often.

Look at just the past twelve months, and only at American films. Here in reverse chronological order are examples: Michael Caine in *A Shock to the System*, Debra Winger in *Everybody Wins*, Jessica Lange in *Music Box*, Jessica Tandy and Morgan Freeman in *Driving Miss Daisy*, Morgan Freeman and Denzel Washington in *Glory*, Margaret Sophie Stein, Lena Olin, and Anjelica Huston in *Enemies*, Emily Lloyd in *In Country*, James Spader and Andie MacDowell in *sex, lies, and videotape*. This list is selective; there are others.

The people and performances in the list range from immense experience (Tandy) to comparative beginners (MacDowell), from hypercaloric intensity (Assante) to an almost free-floating state (Spader). Whatever the distinctions between them, all these performances were realistic. Still, since the great majority of films in every country are realistic, to say this is not much more than to say that the performances were on film. In the theater we can see—if less frequently than once upon a time—varied styles of acting; in films the compass is narrower. But within that compass, actors in American films ring a lot of changes when they get the chance. Compare Ron Silver the Talmudist in *Enemies* with Ron Silver the psychosexual maniac in *Blue Steel*. Of course the two scripts called for two different Silvers, but Silver supplied them.

Good acting in American films is not a recent phenomenon. Lillian Gish made *Way Down East* in 1920. For the first thirty-five years or so, studios were run by men concerned with film, with the development of stars and of cadres of supporting players. A fearsome amount of acting in the Golden Age was not good, or even passable, but when it *was* good, it was due in some measure to what André Bazin called the genius of the system.

Nowadays conditions are so different, so devoid of "system," that a good performance seems almost an act of individual heroism. Most of the jeremiads about current conditions are accurate. Filmmaking is now owned by nonfilmmakers. The general aim is to produce blockbusters; the production process often starts with the packaging of projects by agents around stars and others whom they represent. Sequels and horror films that require only warm bodies rather than actors flood the screen, as if to prove Mencken's crack that there's no underestimating the American intelligence. (An inanity called *Look Who's Talking* has gone through the box-office roof, and a sequel is planned. *Bird on a Wire*, the nadir of the month, is a smash and will doubtless be followed by Birds on Other Wires.)

Yet in the midst of this money maelstrom, good films get made, from the small-scale (*sex, lies, and videotape*) to the large (*Glory*). And within these films, even within much lesser ones, actors who believe in truth-through-acting manage to achieve it. More: speaking only of New York and acknowledging the wider potentialities in the theater, I'd say that the best realistic acting now available to us is on the screen.

How does this current good film acting come about, when it does? Risky though it is to explain the provenance of good art, I offer a conjecture. Perhaps, after ninety years, actors are beginning to feel more confident that film is a fit home for good acting. In the past, there was a hierarchy of theater over film, with the theater as the locus toward which every serious actor aspired. This hierarchy seems no longer to be valid. Half of the people named earlier, so far as I know, have never appeared on the stage. With the passage of time and the alterations in the cultural landscape, the idea of good acting now seems appropriate to film itself, instead of being something that sometimes spills over from the theater.

This relocation of energy prospers in the face of hostile industrial conditions because the urge to act well always struggles toward possibilities for fulfillment.

One of the best of present-day film actors, Michael Caine, presents his professional thoughts in *Acting in Film*, which is simultaneously published in two forms—not hardbound and paperbound

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Longtime Companion. *Craig Lucas's screenplay traces the history of AIDS between 1981 and 1989, as it affects a group of New York gays. No exploitation; honesty and compassion. (Reviewed 5/28/90)* **Pathfinder.** *Made in Lapland, in the Lapp language. A folk epic done with style and color by good actors and a good first-time director, Nils Gaup. It's like a minor, snowbound John Ford film. (6/11/90)* **Q&A.** *Sidney Lumet at home in a New York police-and-drug story. Excellent city flavor and exceptionally strong acting. (5/21/90)* **Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!** *Madness in Madrid, as Pedro Almodóvar recounts an enforced romance, which becomes genuine, between a kidnapped porno star and her adoring captor. Flashy fun. (5/14/90)* **—SK**

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but hardbound and videotape (Applause Theater Books, book, 153 pp., $14.95; videotape, sixty minutes, $39.95). This joint publication is an excellent idea because one form gives you words to consider and the other presents the actor himself, in his own voice and person illuminating those words. Though a good deal of the material occurs in both forms, the book contains matter that is not on the tape—some advice about preparation and about socializing on the set, for instance—and the tape includes things that couldn't be in the book—Caine directing young actors in scenes from three of his films, *Alfie*, *Deathtrap*, and *Educating Rita*.

The source is a Dramatis Personae-BBC series on acting techniques, which dealt with opera, farce, Restoration style, and so on. In 1986 (he mentions on the tape that he is fifty-three at the time) Caine spent two days speaking to and working with a group of young English actors, explaining and demonstrating to these theater-oriented people, with friendly authority, why and how film acting is different.

At first he seems merely to be offering practical tips—how to con your partner in a love scene into using a breath freshener, etc. Then he proceeds to specifics of technique. One among dozens of instances:

> When you are the on-camera actor in a close-up, never shift your focus from one eye to the other. Sounds odd, doesn't it? But when you look at something, one of your eyes leads. So during a close-up be especially careful not to change whichever eye you are leading with. It's an infinitesimal thing, but noticeable on the screen. The camera misses nothing!

On the tape he demonstrates a shift. It *is* infinitesimal, but at the least this advice is an aid to concentration, and concentration is one of his key terms.

In his directing of the young actors, he emphasizes that the camera is their friend and that less is always more but that less is never nothing. He makes them search for the core of every line, the reason that it is worth saying.

The more general thoughts are in the book:

> Audiences themselves have had a lot to do with the changes in film acting. They catch on very fast to what is truthful and what is not. Once audiences saw acting like Henry Fonda's in *The Grapes of Wrath*, they tuned in to the difference between behavior that is based on carefully observed reality and the stagier, less convincing stuff. . . . Over the years, the modern cinema audience has been educated to watch for and catch the minute signals an actor conveys.

Caine's spectrum isn't wide, but everything he says is sensible and much of it is resonant. At any rate, the book and tape taken together—which I recommend—help to explain how one of the most reliable of actors got that way. •

Art, money, New York, the 1980s: a jeremiad.

The Decline of the City of Mahagonny

By Robert Hughes

I.

In the early 1960s, when I was a baby critic in Australia, it seemed that faraway New York had become a truly imperial culture, the heir to Rome and Paris, setting the norms of discourse for the rest of the world's art. (This sense of imperial role, and the nervousness that it induced in the provinces, would later be summed up by Irving Sandler in the title of his fine book on Abstract Expressionism, *The Triumph of American Painting*.) Between 1945 and 1970, the quarter century that saw the rise and the flowering of the New York School, three generations of remarkable painters and sculptors seemed to have taken centrality away from Europe.

First there had been the Abstract Expressionists: Pollock, de Kooning, Rothko, Newman, David Smith, Gorky, Guston, Krasner, Motherwell. Then there were the slightly younger painters whom Clement Greenberg and his school had nominated as the continuers of art history, the ones on whom the future of painting as a high art was alleged (wrongly, as it turned out) to depend: Noland, Olitski, Frankenthaler, and especially Louis. And then the younger men—and a few women—who rose at the beginning of the 1960s, Johns and Rauschenberg, followed by Oldenburg, Lichtenstein, Rosenquist, Warhol, Kelly, Stella, Judd, Smithson, Morris, di Suvero, Serra; and from there one could make one's own list, which by the end of the 1970s might well have painters such as Susan Rothenberg and Brice Marden and sculptors such as Joel Shapiro. And of course Philip Guston again—reborn, since 1968, as a figurative artist of extraordinary power.

It would be foolish to claim that between 1945 and 1970 New York rivaled Paris between 1870 and 1914. America has never produced an artist to rival Picasso or Matisse, or an art movement with the immense resonance of Cubism. Still, marvelous work was done there, and it can certainly be said of the New York School that its artists often showed those "native" qualities listed by Frederick Jackson Turner in his history of the American frontier, qualities that seem inseparable from a younger America and are looked back on with nostalgia by Americans now: "That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness, that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients . . . that restless, nervous energy, that dominant individualism . . . and withal that buoyancy and exuberance."

In Australia, again, one saw this triumph from afar, going down Fifty-seventh Street with its tramping legions and subjugated Gauls, its gold and purple and apotropaic cries. And one's response came out as a sigh: resignation to one's own cultural irrelevance. We were already used to that irrelevance, since for most of the 200-year history of white Australia the colonial experience had bitten deeply into us and caused the Cultural Cringe.

The Cultural Cringe is the assumption that whatever you do in the field of writing, painting, sculpture, architecture, film, dance, or theater is of unknown value until it is judged by people outside your own society. It is the reflex of the kid with low self-esteem hoping that his work will please the implacable father, but secretly despairing that it

ROBERT HUGHES's collection of essays, *Nothing If Not Critical*, will be published by Knopf in August, along with a revised and updated edition of *The Shock of the New*.

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can. The essence of cultural colonialism is that you demand of yourself that your work measure up to standards that cannot be shared or debated where you live. By the manipulation of such standards, almost anything can be seen to fail, no matter what sense of finesse, awareness, and delight it may produce in its own setting.

Great art is seldom repressive, but there is no tyranny like the tyranny of the unseen masterpiece. That was our predicament. In Australia we had art schools teaching people how to make Cézannes, but our museums had no Cézannes to show us. The seen and fully experienced masterpiece tends to liberate; but reproduction is to aesthetic awareness what telephone sex is to sex. In Australia, without knowing it, we were anticipating that worthless "freedom" from the original art object, the sense of floating among its media clones, which would be so lauded in New York in the 1980s as a part of the postmodernist experience. It was stifling to independent judgment. There have been fine painters in Australia, at least since the rise of its Impressionist school in the 1880s. One can very well imagine an "alternative history" of twentieth-century art with an Australian artist in it, Arthur Boyd or Fred Williams. But we Australians tended to be afraid to claim our own qualities, for fear of looking gauche—not just to others, but to ourselves as well.

Much the same thing had happened earlier, of course, in the United States. Few people today would dispute that Thomas Eakins and Winslow Homer were among the greatest of nineteenth-century realists. Very few Americans wanted to believe that thirty years ago, for fear of being judged provincial by other, Francophile Americans. In Australia, for fear of seeming unsophisticated, we kept wondering, is this up to international standards? We had no answer, because we could not articulate these "standards" for ourselves.

Thirty years ago Abstract Expressionism was pretty well a mandatory world style. In Australia we looked at it with awe. The bottle in which its messages washed up on our shore (the paintings themselves did not cross the Pacific) was the magazine *ARTnews*. Its hagiographic tone was clear. Except for the titans of the history books, from Michelangelo and Leonardo down to Picasso and Matisse, whose work we hadn't seen either, we had never read the kinds of claims made for any artist that Harold Rosenberg or Thomas Hess made for figures such as Barnett Newman and Willem de Kooning. They were grand enough to stifle aesthetic dissent. Only contact with the originals could have tested them, and we could not see the originals. Thus, although we did not know it, we were in the situation of many *American* artists outside New York in 1960—flat on our backs, waiting for the missionary.

This act of unwonted humility was made by thousands of people concerned with the making, distribution, teaching, and judgment of art, not only in places like Australia but throughout Europe and—not incidentally—in America in the mid-1960s. They resigned themselves to an imperial situation. Imperialism creates provincialism: it standardizes things, straightens out the edges. The periphery yearns for the reassurance of the center—to submerge its fragile and only partly definable identity in something manifestly strong. Just as late imperial Roman sculpture looks much the same all around the Mediterranean, and statues of Lenin vary little from the Finland Station to Tashkent (though the god's features get more Asiatic as they travel east), so the modernist image tends toward standardization from the centers out.

The difference today is that we have, instead of an imperialism of place, an imperialism of the marketplace, and it operates internationally. From Basel to Canberra, from Minneapolis to Venice, late-modern collections are bought from essentially the same *menu touristique*. If Antarctica had a museum of modern art, the penguins would certainly contemplate an Ellsworth Kelly, a mock-Tantric watercolor by Francesco Clemente, a straw-and-mudscape by Anselm Kiefer, a nice lump of frozen fat by Joseph Beuys. So what has this done to the vision of Imperial Manhattan, at the end of what probably has been the worst decade in the history of American art?

II.

In America, nostalgia for things is apt to set in before they go. Perhaps some people already feel stirrings of nostalgia for the 1980s. Their feelings are premature.

If cultural cycles did not have their own momentum, their own life span, neither measured in decades, one would now murmur a small prayer of gratitude for release and reach for the Maalox. But we will not be out of the 1980s for years. Few of the social conditions that fostered the decade's cultural traits have changed, or seem ready to change. The decade may be officially dead, but it won't lie down yet.

In the 1980s the scale of cultural feeding became gross, and its ailment coarse; bulimia, the neurotic cycle of gorge and puke, the driven consumption and regurgitation of images and reputations, became our main cultural metaphor. Never had there been so many artists, so much art, so many collectors, so many inflated claims, so little sense of measure. The inflation of the market, the victory of promotion over connoisseurship, the manufacture of art-related glamour, the poverty of art training, the embattled state of museums—these will not vanish, as at the touch of a wand, now that it is 1990. But at the same time few people outside the United States continue to believe in the New York imperium. Europe has risen again, and with a vengeance.

There is much to suggest that in the 1980s New York not only lost its primacy as an art center, but also began to go the way of its predecessors: Paris in the 1950s and Rome in the 1670s, over the hill into decline. The point is not that New York has been replaced by some other city as center. It has not been, it will not be. Instead, the idea of the single art center is now on the verge of disappearing. The decline of New York is only a prelude to that situation.

The sense of loss, which was rather more than a mere faltering of creative momentum, was not confined to New York. It may be that Picasso's death in 1973 marked the end of a period in Western art as emphatically as the deaths of Sophocles and Euripides in the same year (406 B.C.) marked the end of high tragic drama in Greece. Tragedies continued to be written in Greek, and some quite good ones; but the age of tragedies was past, and the age of the histories had begun. We are all conditioned by the art market and the decadent myth of modernist progress into thinking that there is no such thing as a slump in cultural history. But slumps do happen. We are in one now.

When Americans in the 1950s and 1960s eagerly claimed that their art had superseded that of Europe, their eagerness was itself a period phenomenon. The American Revolution, deep in its heart, had held the vision of a corrupt Europe. The hold of Europe was long and tenacious, but it could be demystified by showing its moral obsoleteness. The idea that Europe was culturally exhausted was an important ingredient of American self-esteem. Its ancient craftiness, its subtlety, its strata of memory, its persistent embrace of elitist against "democratic" cultural values: these, in American eyes, were grounds for suspicion, even hostility. And if an artist openly espoused them, or seemed, for a moment, like Robert Motherwell, lost in

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admiration of them, then he had to acquit himself of charges of self-indulgence, as though he were claiming experiences that were not truly his.

Europe was to be transcended, outdone. Thus the power of Berenson's appeal to the plutocrats of Chicago, New York, and Boston at the turn of the century—just as the art of the Italian Renaissance came pouring into America, under his guidance, at the start of its museum age—was his promise of a new Renaissance that would outdo the old one, an American one, whose paintings and sculpture would nevertheless furnish indispensable refinement to the new. It may be that Berenson actually believed this. His audiences certainly did. It was a desire that none too subliminally shaped the program of history presented by the most influential of all American museums, the Museum of Modern Art in New York: the passing of the torch from failing Europe to vigorous America.

But the "American Century," whose arrival was eagerly proclaimed after 1945, is now at an end. It finished ignobly, amid the glitzy triumphalism of Reagan's presidency, and its squandered resources cannot be willed back into being. New York's loss of vitality as an art center runs parallel to events in the larger culture of politics, economics, and the mass media. It is part of a general aging of the United States: a stagnation, a willing surrender to media images and unargued persuasion. It is connected, not causally but by analogy, to the extraordinary decay of American public life. But it has also been caused by a loss of talent in painting and sculpture, which is itself connected to a general decline in standards of artistic education.

The idea of the hegemony of American art in the 1950s and 1960s sprang from the narcissistic assumption that people everywhere aspired to the condition of Americans, so that aesthetic issues that filled the New York horizon could be transferred anywhere, regardless of local traditions, imagery, preoccupations. This reflected America's larger political assumptions of the time: its belief in the country's moral leadership in a Manichaean world divided between disinterested American light and devouring Russian darkness; the conviction of some of its leaders that, in Henry Luce's words, "no nation in history, except ancient Israel, was so obviously designed for some special phase of God's eternal purpose." Nobody of any intelligence believes that kind of fustian today. In the visual arts, where New York lives in a state of continuous hype but diminished expectation, it is merely the echo of a lost time.

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Nothing comes around again. Who could possibly compare the efforts of our fin de siècle in the visual arts with those of a hundred years ago? Merely to invite the comparison seems so unfairly loaded against the scale of our cultural expectations as to be, well, impolite. The nineteenth century went out in a blaze of glory. The period between 1885 and 1905 was one of striking cultural energy and confidence. It was not a decline, and not by any means a mere prelude to modernism. Europe then had, among others, Cézanne, Monet, Seurat, Degas, Matisse, van Gogh, Gauguin, Munch, Rodin. We, the pessimist might say, have network television and the pallid ghost of Warhol.

The more hopeful, or the less dismissive, can readily name twenty or so painters and sculptors of real merit who are at work today, some in Britain, some in Europe, some in New York: from senior figures such as Richard Diebenkorn, Robert Motherwell, Antoni Tapiès, Jasper Johns, Cy Twombly, Arthur Boyd, Lucian Freud, and Francis Bacon, through the middle generation (Ilya Kabakov in Moscow; Avigdor Arikha in Paris; sculptors Magdalena Abakanowicz, Nancy Graves, William Tucker, and Joel Shapiro; in England, Frank Auerbach, Howard Hodgkin, and R. B. Kitaj), to such younger artists as Anselm Kiefer, Susan Rothenberg, Neil Jenney, Sean Scully, Elizabeth Murray, Martin Puryear, Tony Cragg, and maybe one or two hopeful group events such as the collaboration of Tim Rollins and K.O.S. (Kids of Survival). Still, they are not likely to seem as consequential as those of a century ago, and the good ones will look like raisins bedded, very far apart, in the swollen duff of mediocrity that constitutes most late twentieth-century art. Whether the bad museum art of our own day—David Salle, Gilbert & George, and other *deliciae*—is better or worse than its late nineteenth-century equivalents, than the stuff that Cézanne and van Gogh had to slog their way past, is no longer an open question. Because of the overpopulation of the art world, there is far more of it; and thanks to the lack of discrimination on the market-museum axis, it is, if anything, somewhat worse.

The future cannot be relied on to value what is most fashionable in one's own day, and the remembered figures in 2090 may not be those who were popular in 1990. Who, in 1890, would have predicted that the obscure and clumsy Cézanne would cause a revolution in values that would oust the masterly, "impeccable" diction of Bouguereau from the history books? (But then who, in 1960, would have bet on Bouguereau's return to our museums in the eclectic revivalism of the

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1980s?) The most famous painter in northern Europe in the 1890s was not Gustave Klimt, not Egon Schiele, not Edvard Munch, but an Austrian named Hans Makart. His studio in Vienna, a huge hangar of a place full of antlers, Persian rugs, and palms, was a shrine of pilgrimage for collectors from all over Europe. There he hung his enormous paintings—battle scenes, varied with bits of mythology for gentlemen who preferred nymphs. Public belief in Makart's genius was second only to his own. Journalists hung on his table talk. Sentimental and bombastic, he was the Julian Schnabel of the Ringstrasse, with the difference that Makart could draw. And today he is almost wholly forgotten—except in Vienna, where he remains a curiosity of its Belle Epoque.

The last fin de siècle was greeted by the middle classes of Western Europe and America as a time of inordinate hope, although its hopes were not the ones we have today. Imperial thinking—French, German, British, and in the form of "manifest destiny," American—was at its peak. The presiding metaphors were of conquest and development: of oceans, air, mineral strata, jungles, and foreign peoples—Kipling's "lesser breeds without the Law." No limit to the promise of technological development was apparent to the men who ran this world, and the idea that the globe was itself a finite resource would have struck them as absurd—largely because they did not have the industrial capacity, as we do, to exploit it to the limit, or the range of markets to support such an exploitation. Their world was much less crowded than ours. It was not on the edge of being used up. We think of preservation, they thought of expansion.

If established power was hopeful, so was radical dissent. A hundred years ago the promise of radicalism was young, and, before its ruin at the hands of Lenin, Stalin, and their heirs, it was relatively innocent. For instance, the political relations of some French artists and writers with the radical life—first Courbet with his friend Proudhon, then Signac, Fénéon, Mallarmé, and the editors of *La Revue Blanche* with anarchists of the 1880s and 1890s—proceeded in a spirit of hope for betterment of the world through universal brotherhood. They may have been wrong, but they were decently wrong. They did not have the flippant, reamed-out cynicism that passes for "radicality" in the art industry's embrace of Jean Baudrillard. And no politically inclined artist in those years faced what his modern counterpart must contend with, and in a mass-media environment lose to: the draining away of art's power as a witness.

In the visual arts, the confidence of the last fin de siècle had its echoes. They made themselves heard subliminally, in the belief that Nature was still an unfailing regulator of thought and an inexhaustible storehouse of forms for the artist or the architect, while "exotic" cultural traditions—Japanese, for van Gogh, Whistler, or Monet; Breton or Polynesian, for Gauguin; African, for the young Picasso—could be raided at will. (The desire to be primitive was very much a function of fin-de-siècle imperialism; it appealed to strong egos and domineering minds.)

Moreover, the excellence of fin-de-siècle painting and sculpture rested on a firm belief in the artist's ability to consult and to use the past of his own culture, freely and without prophylactic irony—as summarized in Cézanne's belief that "the way to Nature lies through the Louvre, and the way to the Louvre through Nature." Michelangelo was available to Rodin in a way that he may be available to no sculptor now. No living architect in the West today can bring to inherited motifs and crafts the sublime freedom with which Luis Domenech y Montaner deployed his Catalan traditions of ironwork, glass, and ceramics in the Palau de la Música Catalana (1905-08) in Barcelona.

This was partly because no myth of cultural repudiation (as enshrined in Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism) had yet arisen, although there was certainly an emphasis on the renewal of art's language; and partly because the training of artists had changed little, in its essential emphases, since the sixteenth century. Thus the Belle Epoque's legacy to later artists, to Miró, Picasso, and Matisse, was fecund and continuous. If Jacopo Pontormo had walked into the life class of one of the big teaching ateliers of Paris in 1890, he would have recognized immediately what was going on. If the same time machine were to deposit him in Walt Disney's Academy for the Briefly New, in the California Institute of Arts, in 1990, he might not recognize it as an art school at all. Who could blame him?

For nearly a quarter century, late-modernist art teaching (especially in America) has increasingly succumbed to the fiction that the values of the so-called academy—meaning, in essence, the transmission of disciplined skills based on drawing from the live model and the natural motif—were hostile to "creativity." This fiction enabled Americans to ignore the inconvenient fact that virtually all the artists who created and extended the modernist enterprise between 1890 and 1950, Beckmann no less than Picasso, Miró and de Kooning as well as Degas or Matisse, were formed by the atelier system, and could no more have done without the particular skill it inculcated than an aircraft can fly without a runway.

The philosophical beauty of Mondrian's squares and grids begins with the empirical beauty of his apple trees. Whereas, thanks to its tedious obsession with the therapeutic, America's art schools in the 1960s and 1970s tended to become crèches, whose aim was less to transmit the difficult skills of painting and sculpture than to produce "fulfilled" personalities. At this, no one could fail. Besides, it was easier on the teachers if they left their students to do their own thing. It meant they could do *their* own thing, and not teach; and many of them could not draw either. A few schools, such as the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, held out, and tried to give their students a solid grounding. They were very few.

Other factors contributed to the decay of the fine-arts tradition in American schools in the 1960s and 1970s. One was the increased attachment of art teaching to universities, which meant that theory tended to be raised above practice. Thinking deep thoughts about histories and strategies was more noble than handwork, and it produced an exaggerated drift toward the conceptual. And this interlocked in a damaging way with the reliance on reproduction of works of art, instead of direct contact with the originals.

Few people now remember a time when the thirty-five-millimeter color slide was not the main fodder of art teaching, for artists and for art historians. For the last quarter century, the major source of most students' contact with art has been slides, not originals, and this has relentlessly nudged their experience toward the disembodied, the conceptual, the *not there*. The size and the number of art classes have made the didactic museum visit obsolete, and most art schools are out of convenient reach of great museums. As Cleve Gray recently pointed out, slides and reproductions have reduced, and for some all but destroyed, the sense of uniqueness of works of art, the physical presence that Walter Benjamin called their "aura."

In the slide or reproduction, no work of art appears in its true size, or with its vital qualities of texture, color, and the recorded movement of the shaping hand intact. A Klee, a Pollock, or a lunette of the Sistine Chapel—all undergo the same abstraction, the same loss of pres-

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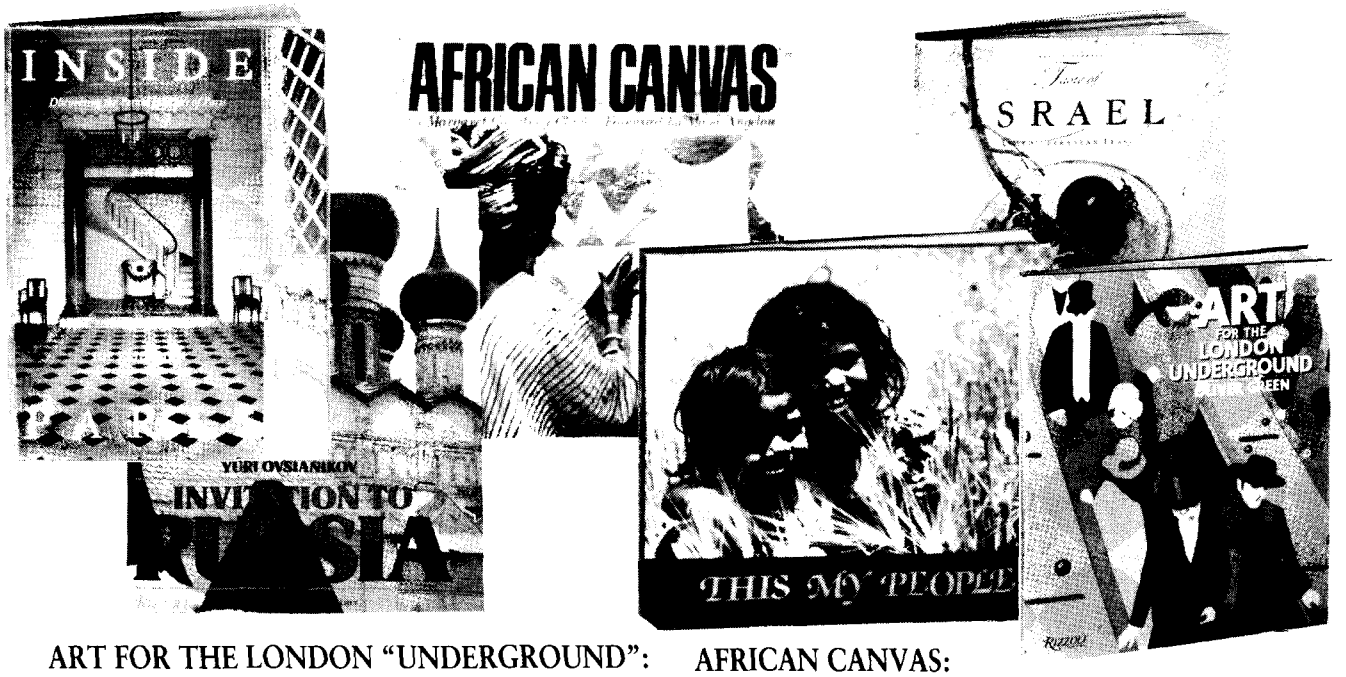
THE ARTS AROUND THE WORLD



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ence. Impartially, they lose one of the essential factors of aesthetic experience, the size of the artwork relative to our sense of our own bodies: its scale. There were reasons why Picasso painted *Three Women* (1908) on a canvas six-and-a-half by six feet, and *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1912) on a surface one-fortieth that size. He meant the former to stand up before the eye sculpturally, like the Michelangelo *Slaves*, which are its distant ancestors, figures locked sleepily in their red stony space, their slow torsion speaking kinesthetically to one's own sense of bodily weight and size; the latter accepts one's gaze more intimately, like a view through a little window. When both come out the same apparent size in a plate or a slide, the penumbra of meaning inherent in their actual scale as paintings cannot survive. Does this lie behind the peculiar confusion of size with scale that afflicted so much American painting in the 1980s—the inflation of the artwork in its pursuit of a factitious "importance"?

A slide gives you the subject, the nominal image of the work, without conveying a true idea of its pictorial essence. You cannot, by looking at a slide, think and feel your way back into the manner in which something was made; only by studying the real thing. And no tradition of making can be transmitted without such empathy. Did this help to foster the dull blatancy of so much recent American painting, all impact and no resonance? Have the falsifications of the reproduced image fed back into the new originals, cutting out those very qualities that cannot survive reproduction—subtleties of drawing, touch, and brushwork, of color and tone, that slow up the eye and, beyond the quick look, encourage a slow absorption?

III.

But the real disjuncture between the fins de siècle lies deeper than this. A hundred years ago, painting and sculpture were still socially dominant forms. They continued to supply, to an extent now all but lost to us, the visual codes by which one interpreted the world. Mass media, except for print, did not exist. Photography had begun to fill the gap between fantasy and reality, reducing the effort of firsthand experience, but it was not yet a democratic medium: few could take their own pictures (that would begin in 1888, with George Eastman's preloaded cameras), and halftone reproduction, which put photographs on the pages of the daily press, was still uncommon. Cinema was not quite born (Louis Lumière invented the cinematograph in 1894), and the vast popular reach of movies lay far in the future, outside social imagination. Not until 1925 were recognizable human features transmitted by television. Nor did television become a mass hypnotic in the United States until after 1945. Elsewhere in the West its advent was even longer delayed; if you were born before 1940 in Australia, you could reach college-graduate age without watching, let alone having, a television set.

Because mass visual media hardly existed in the world of our grandparents and great-grandparents, painting and sculpture carried more weight: the weight of tradition, dreams, and social commemoration. The very idea of "radical" change in painting and sculpture gained its impetus from their primacy, and lost it when that primacy was lost. The political leader in 1890 might crave a bronze figure of himself in the square, but that kind of propaganda is now archaic, replaced by the forty-five-second attack commercial, as public oratory has been replaced by the sound bite and the managed press conference.

When Parisian gallery-goers in the 1870s recoiled in horror from the "leprous" blue shadows in a Monet, it was because they felt an important contract had been broken—the agreement between painting, as a primary form of social discourse, and reality. No painting can offend anyone in this way today, because painting is no longer our index of the real. Instead, photography enrages the moralist, as in the imbroglio between Jesse Helms and the National Endowment for the Arts over the work of Robert Mapplethorpe. If that overrated photographer, instead of sticking a bullwhip up his ass and pretending to be the devil in front of his Hasselblad, had done it on network television, the fuss would have been even greater. If the image had been painted, however, who would have much cared?

In 1989 the average American spent nearly half of his or her conscious life watching television. Two generations of Americans (including American artists) have now grown up in front of the TV, their consciousness permeated by its shuttle of bright images, their attention span shrunken by its manipulative speed, their idea of success dictated by its collapse of fame into celebrity, their anxiety level (at least among smarter ones, again including artists) raised by its sheer pervasive power.

This has not been a matter of choice, let alone fault. The power of television goes beyond anything that the fine arts have ever wanted or achieved. Nothing like this Niagara of visual gabble was even imagined a hundred years ago. American network television drains the world of meaning; it makes reality seem dull, slow, avoidable. It is our "floating world." It tends to abort the imagination by leaving the kids nothing to imagine: every hero and demon is there, raucously explicit, pre-cut, in a world of stereotypes too authoritative for imagination to develop or to change. No wonder American artists have been disposed toward stereotypes. Television is stupidly compelling, in a way that painting and sculpture, even in their worst moments of propaganda or sentimentality, are not.

From Edgar Degas with his Kodak to Robert Rauschenberg with his silk screens, from Hanne Hoch with her clipped collages of news photos to the use of television and ads by the Fluxus group, modern artists have long been fascinated by the mass media. Rauschenberg or Lichtenstein could play with this fascination but still keep their balance inside the fine-arts tradition. Warhol, a commercial artist to the core, took the step (gingerly, at first) outside it, in his acolyte's embrace of the value-free apparitions of the Tube. The next generation of American artists, Andy's children, followed him en masse. They could not imagine a fine-arts tradition that was not overshadowed by television. Accordingly, a peculiarly slack form of thinking (whose institutional site, in New York, was the Whitney Museum of American Art) arose about art and media. Nature is dead, culture is all, everything is mediated (mediation, indeed!) to the point where nothing can be seen in its true quality, representation determines all meaning, and the only way that "so-called high art" can engage with general perception is to step out of its old "elitist" traditions and follow the Yellow Brick Road of the "cutting edge" that leads through Deconstruction Flats and the Forest of Signs to Jeff Koon's porcelain pigs.

The trip turns out not to be worth taking. It has produced a clever novelty art of diminishing returns. Far from affording artists continuous inspiration, mass-media sources for art have become a dead end. They have combined with the abstractness of institutional art teaching to produce a fine-arts culture given over to information, not to experience. This faithfully echoes the general drain of concreteness from modern existence—the reign of unassimilated data, in place of events that gain meaning by being absorbed into the fabric of imaginative life. The numbed eclecticism of 1980s art, its fondness for pastiche and historical deck-shuffling, its vision of art history as a mere box of samples—these were the signs of a culture given over to surfaces.

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Their imaginative drought reminds one of a sad Russian joke: today you can order a steak by telephone—and get it by television.

There are extreme differences between the values of painting and sculpture and the values of mass media. The work of art requires the long look. It is a physical object, with its own scale and density as a thing in the world. Its images do not pass. They can be contemplated, returned to, examined in the light of their own history. It is layered and webbed with references to inner and outer worlds that are not merely iconic. It can acquire (although it does not automatically have) a spiritual aspect, which rises from its power to evoke contemplation.

Fine art is infinitely more than an array of social signs awaiting deconstruction. Its social reach is smaller than that of the mass media, and it finds the grounds for its survival in being what the mass media are not. It now seems that if one opens "art" to include more and more of the dominant media that have no relation to art, the alien goo takes over; and the result is, at best, a hybrid form of short-impact conceptualism trying to be spectacle. Static, handmade visual art cannot furnish an answer to big media, or even an effective debunking of them. The working relation of most 1980s artists to them has been that of a fairly tough fly to flypaper.

One saw this in Robert Longo's work in the early 1980s—an oversized mélange of technical sophistication and sentimental blatancy, with more wallop than resonance. It came, in a different form, in Barbara Kruger's knockoffs of John Heartfield, with their smugly "challenging" slogans about manipulated identity. It was even purer and duller in Jenny Holzer's plaques and light-emitting-diode readouts—failed epigrams that would be unpublishable as poetry, but that survived in the new art context, their prim didacticism so reminiscent of the virtuous sentiments that the daughters of a pre-electronic America used to embroider on samplers. The work that got into the American limelight after Neo-Expressionism prided itself on its political correctness, but most of its messages might as well have been sent by Western Union. Probably the only American artist of this generation who managed to introduce a real shudder of feeling into media-based work was Cindy Sherman, enacting her parade of gender caricatures, bad dreams, and grotesqueries for the camera.

Not much of the art that really seems to matter is being made in New York today. There is a haunting parallel with Paris at the end of the 1950s, when the French were busy persuading themselves that Soulages, Poliakoff, Hartung, Mathieu, and others formed a generation that could eventually step into the shoes of the patriarchs of the Paris School, most of whom (except Picasso and Braque) were dead. Several important younger artists were, of course, at work: Giacometti, Dubuffet, Balthus, Hélion. One could certainly believe that the tanks were not emptying. Yet today, for the first time in 300 years, there is not one really great artist at work in Paris. And so it is with New York. The great city has gone on with frantic energy not as an art center but as a market center, an immense bourse on which every kind of art was traded for ever escalating prices. But amid the growing swarm of new galleries, the premature canonizations and record bids, and the conversion of much of its museum system into a promotional machine, the city's cultural vitality—its ability to inspire significant new art and foster it sanely—has been greatly reduced.

In part this was due to economic pressures, notably from the real estate market. These deprived younger artists—along with small theater companies, dance groups, and the rest—of working space in Manhattan. Complaints about this are an old part of New York life, of course: even in the 1920s people were complaining that Greenwich Village bohemia was dying on its feet, made homeless by what later journalists would call gentrification. But in the 1980s the supply of affordable workspace for artists in Manhattan finally ran out.

The idea of the New York painter in a big white downtown loft—bohemia with industrial spaces—is about as real as the notion that French painters wear berets and live in high studios in Montparnasse. The working bohemia of New York artists made its last stand in the very early 1970s, when SoHo had no name, two galleries (Paula Cooper and Max Hutchinson), and two bars (Fanelli's and the long-defunct Luizzi's). All the ground-floor spaces of West Broadway now occupied by fashion boutiques and art galleries then held small, tenacious businesses—hardwood-flooring companies, knife grinders, plastic injection molders, fabric offcut warehouses: survivors of an industrial past that went back to the Civil War, whose pragmatism seemed to underwrite the kind of art that was being made by semilegal tenants with Murphy beds and industrial leases (no heat after 5:30) in the lofts above. The annals of this last American bohemia remain largely unwritten. But the loft on Prince Street

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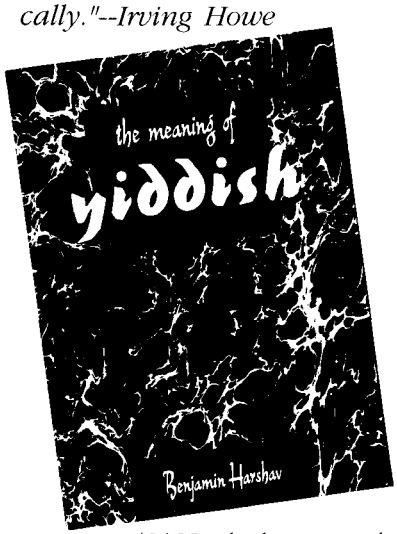

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that rented for $150 a month in 1971 and sold as a co-op floor for $25,000 in 1974 carried a price tag of $750,000 by 1987.

So artists cross the river to find workspace in Bayonne or Hoboken, and commute to see the shows—at which point they may as well stop calling themselves "New York artists" at all, for they are part of no community. Where a young painter thinking of moving to Manhattan in 1970 might have armed herself for the struggle of life in New York, by the mid-1980s she was more likely to give up the idea altogether and stay in Chicago.

Thus, although Manhattan at the end of the 1980s is rivaled by no other American city as a culture market, its ability to draw in new talent, and to foster it in ways that make sense, has almost gone. This is a poor omen. It was always the work of living artists, made in the belief that their work could grow best there and nowhere else, that fueled New York. The critical mass of talent emits the energies that proclaim the center; its gravitational field keeps drawing in more talent, as in the combustion of a star, to sustain the reaction. This process is now dying. And the sense of entropy is compounded by the decay of civic life in New York. Up to a point, the grit, the dirt, the struggle of Manhattan were a stimulus to artists. All kinds of special poetries and particular looks arose from its aggressive materialism—until the late 1980s, when the sheer inequality of New York became overpowering. Doubt arose. Could a city with such extremes of Sardanapalian wealth and Calcutta-like misery foster a sane culture? Did it take more out of an artist than it put in? Why not stay in San Francisco or Chicago (or Barcelona, or Berlin, or Sydney), visit New York occasionally for its museums and its galleries, and otherwise ignore its pull?

New York had never been paradise, and living there, below the kind of income level enjoyed by only one American in forty, had never been easy. (Those who complain about the street squalor of Manhattan as though it were something new should consult the chronicles of New York in the 1840s, when such garbage collection as existed on Broadway was done by packs of half-wild pigs.) But it was in New York that the essence of the Reagan years, of its private affluence and public squalor, cavorted in the limelight. Half of the public officials of the Koch administration in New York, like half of those of the Reagan administration in Washington, seemed to be involved in some kind of criminal scam or shameless conflict of interest. Manhattan's middle class, the protein of urban life, felt squeezed between a small, repellently ostentatious crust of the newly rich and an increasingly demoralized mass of the hopelessly poor, and stepped up its rate of migration to the boroughs across the bridges. Reality shortage, induced by an inflated cult of promotion and celebrity, was acute. The sense of civic space began to collapse under the pressure of real estate greed, the fear of crime, the exploding drug market. And then there was AIDS.

Not one of these woes was confined to Sodom-on-the-Hudson, although New Yorkers (with their appetite for disaster scenarios) were apt to talk as though Manhattan were their special laboratory, a sort of Island of Dr. Moreau in which every kind of deformity was breeding. But social tensions, even plagues, do not in themselves guarantee the decline of a great art center. Delacroix's Paris was no Utopia, except for the few, and many Londoners 200 years ago experienced their city as New Yorkers do today, as

Week as an Example of Years

Monday (The first day back to work—always a blow to the old
Ego, but then) evening: light enough for hours
Outside: the lilies and columbines, the simple city
Birds. Soon the neighbors' windows fill with secret
Light. And up above, helicopters cut apart
The sky: police after men, hunting drugs, money,

Tuesday Or what? (And who isn't addicted to money . . .
Still annoyed today.) I'm getting too old
To worry about crime, all that. Living apart
Is hard enough to manage. And finishing hours
At work. Some weeks are like that. It's no secret
I'm tired. Tired of the office. Tired of the city:

Wednesday The beggars, junkies, art/rock bands, and city
Tourists. And the noise! (Now, would money
Make a difference? Don't make me laugh.) The secret
Is: Don't think about it. Think about the old
Fence I could paint on Saturday, or put in hours
Doing nothing. Nothing is a joy forever, apart

Thursday From food. An old joke. (Lunch hour: a part
Of me wants something in every window: city
Maps of Paris; plaster mules; and *Hours*
With Nude Stars; hats of funny money.)
Am I learning "city beauty" or just old
And laughing at pigeon-tinted salesmen? (Their secrets

Friday Are mine: "Look alert. Smile at the jerks.") My secret
Love: Tobacco; and that throw-away part
Of cigarette cellophane, the old
Red-rimmed top flashes back the city.
Sun-lit, the plastic glows like old money,
Like pay day. Friday. Only two more hours!

Saturday So I didn't fix the fence. But hours
On the balcony, watching birds nest in secret
Branches—this I prefer. And worth the money
For the feeder. Later, dinner in another part
Of the city. The drive, a breeze, as rows of city
Windows catch the light; the sun, pink and old.

Sunday The secret is: Be stupid. The old city
Horses and birds never pray for money
Or hours here, at home, apart.

JUDITH HALL

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money-mad and dangerous to live in, threatened by a large "criminal class" and sapped by proletarian addiction.

The difference between then and now is that the pattern of world cultural activity has made the very idea of the single, imperial center obsolete. New York, in other words, remains *a* center, but not, as its art world used to imagine, *the* center. Its centrality is based mainly on the market, and the market has nothing to do with cultural vitality.

A few years ago a popular neo-Marxist argument held that finesse of taste and connoisseurship were only masks for market activity, genteel ways in which a ravenous commercialism could spin euphemisms about itself. Anyone who believed that should look at the art market today. It is now run almost entirely by finance manipulators, fashion victims, and rich ignoramuses. The collector as connoisseur has been squeezed out of it. Connoisseurship is an impediment to its progress—mere dust on the road down which the inflationary march proceeds. Under the market's malignant sway, genuine expertise will soon be entirely redundant: the market's object is to erase all values that might impede anything at all from becoming a "masterpiece." In this situation, whose epicenter is New York, the role of the museum, like that of the critic, is attenuated. And because it has never paid more than lip service to the idea of state patronage of the arts, the United States has no dominant cultural institutions that are not tied into the market.

IV.

In the 1980s more paper wealth was generated in New York than in any other city at any other time in human history. Greenmail, junk bonds, leverage, and the precarious liquidity of an overgeared credit economy transformed the art world into the Art Industry, turnover immense, regulations none. What was a picture worth? One bid below what someone would pay for it. And what would that person pay for it? Basically what he or she could borrow. And how much art could dance for how long on that particular pinhead? Nobody had the slightest idea. What is certain is that nobody foresaw the hyperinflation of the market; and that when the bubble bursts, or softly deflates, as bubbles do, nobody will have foreseen that either.

Twenty years ago the idea that any work of art made in the past century would sell for a million dollars seemed like science fiction to most people. In 1972, when the National Gallery of Canberra paid about $2 million for Pollock's *Blue Poles*, the price made headlines and contributed marginally to the Australian public's acceptance of the fall of the Whitlam government soon afterward. Today, when someone pays 5 or 10 million for a modern painting, the event rates no more than a sentence or two in the auction reports of *The New York Times*. We have come to take it for granted that art should be alienatingly expensive: it seems normal that its price should violate our sense of decency.

Although art has always been a commodity, it loses its intrinsic value and its social use when it is treated only as a commodity. To lock it into a market circus is to lock people out of the contemplation of it. This inexorable process tends to collapse the nuances of meaning, and visual experience generally, under the brute weight of price. It is not a compliment to the work. If there were only one copy of each book in the world, fought over by multimillionaires and investment trusts and then hidden in storage, what would happen to one's sense of literature—the tissue of its meanings that sustain a common discourse? "Where works of art are rare," young Goethe wrote on first visiting Naples, "rarity itself is a value; it is only when they are common . . . that one can learn their intrinsic worth." The truth of these words is nearly lost to us, in a culture wrecked by its own commercialization. What strip-mining is to nature, the art market has become to culture.

At the end of the 1980s there may have been 500 people in the world who could pay more than $25 million for a work of art, and tens of thousands who could pay a million: a situation with no historical precedents. Never before have the impulses of art appreciation and collecting been so nakedly harnessed to gratuitous, philistine social display as in the late 1980s, and nowhere more so than in the United States, especially when the Japanese are buying. The new relations between "price" and "value" were epitomized at Sotheby's New York auction of Andy Warhol's collection in 1988, when necrophiles and relic hunters competed to pay $20,000 a piece for the dead artist's cookie jars.

Yet the game had losers as well as winners, and by the late 1980s the losers, interestingly enough, were American. They were chiefly the American museums, and through the museums the American public. The art market boom has been an unmitigated disaster for the public life of art. It has distorted the ground of people's reaction to painting and sculpture. Thirty (even twenty) years ago anyone, amateur or expert, could spend an hour or two in a museum without wondering what this Tiepolo, this

'Listen, my momma may have raised a mean child, but she raised no hypocrites.'

—Molly Ivins, The Progressive

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The Progressive, March 1988.

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Rembrandt, this de Kooning might cost at auction. Thanks to the unrelenting propaganda of the art market, this is no longer quite the case; and the imagery of money has been so crudely riveted onto the face of museum-quality art by events outside the museum that its unhappy confusion between price and value may never be resolved. It is like the bind in the fairy tale: at the bottom of the meadow a treasure lies buried, and it can be dug up under one condition, that while digging, you do not think of a white horse.

There are many areas, moreover, in which American museums can no longer buy. (British museums are worse off: as a result of the malignant policies of Margaret Thatcher, they cannot repair their own roofs.) They voice a litany of complaints, a wrenching sense of disfranchisement and weakness, as their once adequate annual buying budgets of $2 million to $5 million are turned to chicken feed by art inflation. The symbol of the plight of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is an annual booklet that used to be titled *Notable Acquisitions*. In 1986 it was renamed *Recent Acquisitions*. As the museum's director wrote in its preface, the rise of art prices "has limited the quantity and quality of acquisitions to the point where we can no longer expect to match the standards of just a few years ago."

As the museum's buying power fades, public experience of art is impoverished, and the brain drain of gifted young people from curatorship into art dealing accelerates. American museums have been hit, in fact, by a double whammy: art inflation and a punitive rewriting, in 1986, of American tax laws, which destroyed most incentives for the rich to give art away. Tax exemption through donations was the basis on which American museums grew, and it is all but gone, with predictably catastrophic results for the future. Thus, in a historic fit of legislative folly, the government began to starve its museums just at the moment when the art market began to paralyze them.

The inflated market is also eroding the other main function of museums: the loan exhibition. New York's position as art center of the West was based partly on the range, the scholarship, and the aesthetic importance of its museum shows. There is no question that the last fifteen years in the United States have been the golden age of the retrospective, bringing a sequence of remarkable and (for this generation of museums and the public) definitive exhibitions, done at the highest pitch of curatorial effort: late and early Cézanne, Picasso, Manet, van Gogh, Monet, Degas, Watteau, Courbet, Goya, Velázquez, Poussin—and, in 1989, the greatest Cubist show ever held, "Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism" at MOMA. Most of these trans-Atlantic efforts, if not all, were seen in New York.

This type of serious and argued show must be distinguished from the blockbuster that was so much a feature of American cultural life in the 1970s. Nobody—nobody responsible, anyway—believes anymore that great works of past art should be sent around the world for frivolous or merely political reasons. The blockbuster, that curse of American museology, began with two events: André Malraux's loan of the Mona Lisa to the United States in 1963 (so that Mona and Jackie could be in the same room at the same time) and the appearance of Michelangelo's *Pietà* at the World's Fair in Flushing Meadow in 1964, looking like a replica of itself in margarine, the viewers carried past it on a moving walkway. It produced, at its height, frenetic events like Tut, and clunkers like the Metropolitan Museum's 1983 Vatican show. And it ended with that saturnalia of "heritage" nostalgia, "Treasure Houses of Great Britain," at the National Gallery of Art in Washington in 1988.

The time of the blockbuster is gone, and it is no loss. Yet the loss, or even the winding down, of the great monographic exhibitions will prove very serious. That is what the art market threatens. It is difficult for museums even to contemplate larger retrospectives now, and the 1991 Seurat exhibition arranged for Chicago, New York, London, and Paris may be remembered—if it comes off—as one of the last of its kind. When the Metropolitan Museum of Art's "Van Gogh at Arles" was being planned in the early 1980s, it was assigned a global insurance value of $1 billion. Today it would be $5 billion, and the show could never be done. In the wake of the sale of *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*, every owner of a van Gogh wants to believe that his or her painting is worth $82 million, and will not let it off the wall insured for less. So the circulation of pictures is slowing down, and the chances are that museums will again have to rely, as they did forty years ago, more on their permanent collections than on temporary shows—with the difference that these collections, too, will be relatively static. What effect this will have on the American museum audience, conditioned to expect the ever changing stimulus of new art events, remains to be seen.

The 1980s showed how the fear of contraction could lead institutions (the Whitney Museum, notoriously) to lower standards of curatorial judgment in the scramble for corporate underwriting and audience pull. The museum's immersion in the art world as a promotional system reduces its independence of taste; it chooses to mirror "what's happening" for fear that it might seem obsolete. It must take its cues from the market, the main determinant of New York's visual culture in the 1980s. But to invoke "what's happening," as though the museum were just a mirror, is an evasion. There are about 200,000 artists in the United States, each making (at a conservative guess) fifty or so objects a year. From the homeless proletariat of these 10 million works almost anything may be designated as "happening," but it is not likely to have any more significance in the long historical run than, say, Charles Jencks's classification of a previously uncataloged subgroup of Japanese neo-Palladians does in architectural history.

Trends can be condensed at will, and young artists, with careers such as those of Jean-Michel Basquiat or (parody of parodies) Jeff Koons held up before them, are less disposed to accept an ideal of slow maturation. This makes them vulnerable to fashion, prone to seize whatever eye-catching stylistic device they can, no matter how sterile it may be in the long run. The moral economy of the American art world has been so distorted by the hype and the premature careerism of the 1980s that a serious painter in New York must face the same unreality and weightlessness as a serious actor in Los Angeles. The idea of the "cutting edge"—the phrase is still used by some curators—is fatuous, a fossil relic of a belief in artistic "progress" that no one, at the agitated and directionless end of the twentieth century, will defend under its own name.

V.

In thinking of centers, we remain fixed on the ancient Roman model of cultural imperium, and tend to overlook the possibility that things can work differently. For centuries, they did—as in medieval and early Renaissance Italy. The slow growth of its city-states tended to emphasize what was native, local, and patriotic. They fought wars, but none of them had the size, the military reach, or the wealth to subjugate the rest. Hence no Italian state at the end of the quattrocento, not even Rome, had the gravitational field of an imperial center of culture.

At the height of Donatello's career, there were perhaps 65,000 people in Florence. There was a modest international art market. Artists did work in cities other than their own, as Leonardo did

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for the Sforzas in Milan; but travel was difficult, no image could be mechanically reproduced with accuracy, and museums did not yet exist. (The idea of the traveling show was centuries away.) Hence art tended to focus on specific acts of commemoration and propaganda—this fresco of the Last Judgment for our local church, that statue of the hired general who saved us from the baleful Pisans.

The results were regional in the best sense, in the sense that matters. To this day the ancient cities of Italy, big ones such as Florence or little ones such as Todi, convey a satisfying sense of cultural wholeness—of the full use of culture in the interest of local resources. Strictly speaking, this is a relic; they live in the late twentieth century, like us, and can only preserve what remains of the past without significantly adding to it. But at least one can still see the work there within the frame of the landscape, the vernacular architecture, the roots of its meaning.

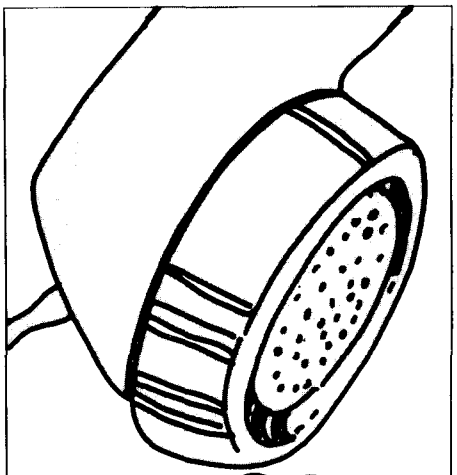
What altered this regional ecology of the arts of Italy, and throughout Europe, was the rebirth of ancient Rome. The bones of the empire rose from the soil and reconstituted themselves as an aesthetic imperium. When Italian artists began to take a systematic interest in the relics of antiquity, the classical past was seen to contain whole systems of norms and forms for the present, of an authority not apparent in the Gothic. Very soon the rediscovery of Vitruvius's writings and the digs in the Forum made the journey to Rome a necessary part of an artist's education. The Florentine, however much he felt that his city was the best of cities, could no longer believe that its aesthetic resources were going to give him all the language he could use. So he went to Rome—like Alberti, like Donatello, like Piero della Francesca, like Michelangelo.

As soon as artists recognize that a place embodies cultural resources whose truth and efficacy exceed the merely local, no matter how fond they are of their own *paese*, the idea of the cultural capital is born. Once the stuff of this cultural stimulus is seen, systems of interpretation will form around it—the academies, the art schools. Their monopoly of technique adds to the gravitational field of the capital. And so do the works that the visitors leave. Michelangelo's Sistine and Paoline frescoes, Raphael's Stanze, became fused with the antique as part of the whole authoritative pattern that later artists come to Rome to experience. Only in the capital could schools of art and bodies of art theory make themselves felt. One of the great benefits of the center is centralized argument.

What could Michelangelo Merisi, growing up in the little northern town of Caravaggio, expect to learn about painting? He had to get to Rome; only Rome could open to him the scale of work and the technical proficiency that he sought. Capitals rejuvenate themselves by this pull. They draw their nourishment from the provinces. Caravaggio, Pietro de Cortona, and the Carracci came to Rome more for its dead artists than its uninspired living ones; most Roman painting in the early seventeenth century was as sunk in affectation as the much-touted *transavanguardia* of the early 1980s. But in the process they transformed Roman painting, and added to the sense of the center for centuries to come. They also changed the work of other foreigners in Rome, so that the Caravaggian style spread all over Europe.

By 1670, however, Rome's decline as a center for living art had begun. It was still obligatory for a serious painter or sculptor to study in this great hive of time, and several more generations of foreigners, from Fragonard and Hubert Robert to the German Nazarenes, did so. But papal patronage slowed after the death of Urban VIII Barberini. There would be no more fresco cycles like Pietro de Cortona's ceilings for the Barberini Palace; no more architectural projects like Bernini's colonnades. Perhaps the outstanding work of visual art produced in Rome in the eighteenth century was the huge corpus of etchings by the Venetian architect Giambattista Piranesi, whose obsessive subject is nostalgia: from the scale of those tiny figures picking their way over fallen pediments or dwarfed by the immense vaults of the *thermae*, we infer an acute sense of lost cultural potency.

When power declines and the center cannot hold, its works of art move into the eddy of the market and wash up where power is great, where money is plentiful, where order reigns. Although the image of Rome as cultural capital survived for centuries, its reality was enacted in Paris. This transfer was the work of Cardinal Mazarin, who took effective control of the French administration in the 1640s and began to move huge quantities of Italian art into France, thereby forming the basis of the state collections centralized in the Louvre. The aesthetic rise of Paris in the seventeenth century had the same epic quality as its political and military rebirth. Before long, a cultivated Parisian could congratulate himself on living in a new Rome, a capital of the arts whose destiny was to be fed by whatever was best in the provinces—the talents of a magistrate's son from Rouen who be-



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came Pierre Corneille, of a boy from Valenciennes named Antoine Watteau.

This confidence in the uniqueness and the supremacy of the capital was reinforced by Napoleon, and by the whole imagery and style of French neoclassicism. It continued to be ratified right through the nineteenth century, up to World War I. The drift of economic history, and the drift of population, fed it, too. France was changing from a nation of countrymen to one of city-dwellers. By 1851 the urban population outnumbered the rural for the first time in France and England. By the 1860s this scheme of opposites—the superiority of the city to the provinces, the hostility of the provinces to the city—was set to become one of the axioms of the modernist creed, and hence of culture itself.

The idea of an avant-garde was born in the nineteenth century, and it was linked to city life. Cities inflicted rapid change on human life. The country stood for slow change, or none at all. The provinces, *la France profonde*, were inherently conservative; Paris, inherently radical. This image of the dynamic capital set against the torpid provinces was tied into all the main cities of modernism—Moscow and Leningrad, Vienna and Berlin, Milan, Barcelona, New York. But Paris was the place where it was first seen as a great issue. "The interior is going to die," complained Edmond de Goncourt in 1891, looking at the demolition crews. "Life threatens to become public. I am a stranger to what is coming, to these new boulevards, implacable in their straight lines, which no longer evoke the world of Balzac, which make one think of some American Babylon of the future."

In this new Babylon, private life gets turned inside out by a new sense of public space. The café and the boulevard are stages that turn life into spectacle. Old social rankings weaken and new ones have to be named by artists—by Degas and Manet, for instance, connoisseurs of the gesture and the passing moment, tracing the fabric of slippages and pretensions. The art of the new Paris, capital of modernism, is fascinated by social ambiguity, with the freedom to make up one's own life.

The idea of the capital city helped to breed two of the most durable elements in the artistic avant-garde: the sense of not having a fixed self, of being free to invent; and the idea of the artist as subversive. These combined to raise two chief themes of modernist self-awareness in art: disconnection and loss, on the one hand—the loss of a secure social past, of a parental tradition; but on the other hand, artistic self-emancipation. Exchange of information was to the modernist capital what the contemplation of nature was to the eighteenth century. By the end of the 1920s the capital had become a machine designed to contemplate itself, to fill the world with images of itself.

Likewise, modern painting and sculpture were hugely affected by the crowding of resources in the great city. Art has to feed on art. The center would not send things to you—you had to go to it, like Picasso going to Paris from Barcelona in 1900. The forms of fin-de-siècle Paris were to modernism what the marbles of Rome had been to classicism: think only of the Eiffel Tower, or of what Picasso and Braque, in their Cubist paintings, did with the texture of signs and reflections seen in the new Paris street, the billboards, the ads, the newspapers, all the mass-produced imagery of an industrial world. There was no such thing as rural Constructivism or pastoral Futurism. And Paris was the dream city of Surrealism, too.

This fixation on the idea of the capital was carried over to New York City. Forty years ago Manhattan was the capital of change—the Rome of instability. "Tomorrow's world—today!" The motto of the 1939 New York World's Fair was also that of America's growing new-culture industry. Europe, with its more fixed orders, might resist change, thereby creating one kind of avant-gardism, in opposition to authoritative culture. But America embraced the new, because its enshrined social and technological myth was one of progress. With a little prodding, it was willing to embrace almost any "radical" cultural change as therapeutic. Its cultural industry was announcing fresh, temporarily unnerving aesthetic changes and telescoping the future into the present. What American was really going to want an academy? Who was afraid of the future? In America the new was strong, tradition (relatively) weak.

Much European modernism, notably Constructivism, had taken its stand on millenarian hope. Abstract art was imagined as the final style, the end of history, in which all tensions and contradictions would be resolved—a religious fantasy at root, like Marx's fantasy of the withering away of the state after the dictatorship of the proletariat. The tyranny of the past could be counteracted by an equal and opposite reign of the future, by an avant-garde forever gazing ahead to utopian prospects that always recede. But this was not congenial to Americans. Here, avant-gardism embraced a more businesslike model of novelty and diversity, the fast obsolescence of products, the conquest of new markets.

In the overcrowded art scene of the 1980s, this would accelerate to the point of hysteria. In the 1950s and 1960s, when there were fewer artists, collectors, and museums, the differences between New York's new-art environment and the "classical" European avant-garde circa 1900-30 were perhaps not obvious, although they certainly became obvious with Pop art. The American idea of avant-garde activity became competitive and inflationary, swollen with excess claims for itself. It still is; but the claims are largely hollow, and the reaction against them, once the false euphoria of the 1980s wears off, will be harsh. In the main, it was a low, dishonest decade for art, American art especially, and part of its dishonesty lay in the pretense that the idea of the "vanguard" still had some relation to aesthetic and ethical values.

Perhaps one of the positive results of the 1980s will be finally to clear our minds of the cant of cultural empire, of nostalgia for the lost imperial center. Under the present circumstances, a great artist can just as easily—and unexpectedly—emerge in Hungary or Australia as in New York. One may bet that in the 1990s the necessary reconstruction work on the strip-mined sites of late modernism will be done in Britain and in Europe, not in the United States. And even there one should not expect too much, or expect it too soon. •

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The Slippery South

BY DAVID HERBERT DONALD

Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South by James Oakes

(Knopf, 246 pp., $22.95)

Writing about the history of the American South continues unabated. Each year the *Journal of Southern History* reviews not dozens but hundreds of books about the region; the invaluable *Interpreting Southern History*, published by John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen in 1987 and 624 pages long, is already out of date. Scholars seem endlessly interested in the Old South and slavery, and at every meeting of historians the debates continue over the timeless, still unanswered questions.

Was the Old South a feudal, or at least a pre-capitalistic, society, or were Southern plantation and slave owners simply a special variety of capitalist entrepreneurs? Was slavery profitable—and if so, for whom, and compared with what? Did the plantation system instill the Protestant work ethic into slaves, or did its very harshness and impersonality inadvertently encourage the emergence of a distinctive and rich Afro-American culture? Were Southern white men an exceptionally violent lot, holding their "honor" in such sensitive esteem that they tended to erupt in murderous rages? Were Southern white women so oppressed that they identified with the black slaves, or were they as enthusiastic supporters of the slave system as the white males? What would the future of the Old South and slavery have been without the war? Did the slave system have to expand or die?

James Oakes, a gifted young historian at Northwestern University, believes that the time has come to recognize that a single question lies behind these old, tangled controversies: Was the Old South fundamentally American, in all essentials little different from the rest of the United States, or did it form a distinctive and unique culture? On this issue, scholars tend to fall into two camps. "Historians who emphasize Southern distinctiveness are usually concerned with society and culture," Oakes shrewdly notes, "while those who see the South as fundamentally 'American' are most often political historians." It is his hope to integrate these "two otherwise distinct bodies of literature . . . into a single interpretation of slavery in the Old South."

Central to Oakes's interpretation is a pattern of ambiguity: on virtually all questions relating to Southern history, he finds the answer to be not either/or, but both/and. Thus he seeks to resolve the question of Southern distinctiveness by reminding us that, in contrast to ancient Greece and Rome, the great modern slave empires—Brazil, the Caribbean, and the United States—emerged at the same time as "the permanent revolution of capitalism." Indeed, without the powerful world market promoted by capitalism, slavery could never have flourished. "Southern slave society emerged within rather than apart from the liberal capitalist world," Oakes reminds us; and for that reason the Old South was, in many respects, much like the rest of the United States. But at the same time he insists that "this does not mean that the slave South was, at bottom, a liberal capitalistic society." It means, rather, that "slavery and liberalism, not individually but in concert, shaped the way Southern men and women lived their lives and encountered one another . . . as slaveholders and yeomen, husbands and wives, masters and slaves."

Oakes's book explores the ways that every social relationship in the Old South was affected by the joint but contradictory forces of slavery and liberal capitalism. Southern slaveowners belonged to "a master class whose culture was at once recognizably American and yet distinctively Southern." Masters attempted to combine "the rationalizing force of capitalism . . . with the irrational substance of slavery." The success of the Southern slave system demanded "a highly developed market economy," yet "master and slave formed what was, at bottom, a non-market relationship." In dealing with slaves, masters theoretically had total power, yet they had to recognize that the "rationalized pursuit of sustained profit" required them to interfere in the lives of the slaves as little as possible. Consequently, Oakes concludes, in one of his many paradoxes, "The fact that the slaves were 'totally' subordinate to the masters did not mean that the master's power over the slave was absolute."

Slaves, too, were caught in a paradoxical situation. All slaves yearned for freedom, and all longed for the protection of their privacy and their families from the rude, even if sometimes well-intentioned, intrusions of their masters. And they also recognized the incompatibility of these two goals, for "the more successfully the slaves protected their families, the more fully they realized their community life, the more effectively their culture explained their circumstances—the more bearable, and peaceful, slavery became."

In this slave society, moreover, yeoman farmers—whites who owned few or no slaves—were also a people of paradox. "In their self-sufficiency, community orientation, and seeming aversion to the market, the yeomanry shared many of the characteristics of a traditional peasantry," Oakes writes. "But in the cycle of accumulation, the readiness of produce for the market when the opportunity arose, and the commitment to private property, the yeoman had all the earmarks of a frontier capitalist." The yeomanry were thus at once "a political force with a distinctive social and economic identity" and a group pulled—by hopes for economic advancement and by racist contempt of the blacks—into cooperation with the master class.

Nowhere were the paradoxes of Southern life more evident than in the relationship between that region and the national government. It is important to remember that America's independence was due in no small part to the efforts of slaveholders such as George Washington, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. "The slaveholders had emerged triumphant from the American Revolution, wielding considerable influence in a new and unified nation," Oakes observes; and for all the Southerners' talk about state rights, they "always relied on the federal government to sustain their power." Still, he notes, "in their very triumph they had helped to unleash forces over which they would eventually lose control." Secession became inevitable when powers of the federal government they had helped to create were about to fall into the hands of those, like Abraham Lincoln, who might one day use those powers against the slave system.

It would be cheering to report that Oakes's formulas have at last solved the problems of Southern history. Unfortunately, the verdict on his book has to be much more qualified. It is not clear, in the first place, just how new his thesis is.

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Few historians will be surprised by his argument that the slave South was part of a liberal capitalistic American society. Nor is it certain that the paradoxes he presents do much more than restate the old dilemmas in a new way. Still more troubling is the static quality of his argument. In this version of Southern history, the period between the American Revolution and the Civil War is treated pretty much as a unit. In this sense *Slavery and Freedom* stands in contrast to Oakes's previous book, *The Ruling Race* (1982), which skillfully traced the remarkable transformation of Southern society during the two generations before the Civil War. Oakes also presents the Southern slaveholders, yeomen, and slaves as monolithic groups; thus the severe disagreements among slaveholders—over territorial expansion, over the restoration of the African slave trade, over the breakup of the Democratic Party in the 1850s, for and against secession—are hardly mentioned.

Appraising Oakes's work is difficult because, as he candidly admits, this is a work of synthesis, resting in large part on the work of previous scholars. The validity of his conclusions depends on the soundness of the works on which he relies, and on the accuracy with which he reports their findings. Neither is unexceptionable. Attempting to show how the planter class in the South was able to perpetuate itself, for example, Oakes suggests that "by eliminating the planters' reliance on the labor of their own children, slavery may have made it possible for large slaveholders in the oldest states to respond to the limited supply of land by reducing the size of their families." In support of this provocative thesis, he notes, quite accurately, that nearly all of the evidence on Southern family limitation—"and there is not much of it"—comes from Virginia in the late antebellum decades. Then, on the very next page, the proposition he tentatively advanced has become a hard fact: "By reducing the size of their families . . . , masters assured the survival of the slaveowning class over succeeding generations."

Or, to take another example, is it really clear that "the battle between Whigs and Democrats [that] raged with ferocious intensity across most of the South" during the 1830s and 1840s reflected the "tensions between slaveholders and yeomen"? The most careful studies of Southern political behavior, such as those by Thomas B. Alexander, have not been able to identify class bases of Southern political parties. Or is it true that "the most direct and irresistible pressure" exerted on Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation was "from the slaves who . . . ran away"? Most historians would put greater stress on the military situation of the Union armies, on the political situation in the North, and on the danger of European intervention in the American Civil War.

Such queries—and there is not space here to list dozens of others—do not invalidate Oakes's central thesis, but they do suggest that his explanations have to be carefully scrutinized. *Slavery and Freedom* should be read, as Oakes himself asks, as an essay in interpretation, "frankly exploratory and by intent suggestive rather than definitive." It does succeed in bringing into sharp focus the most vexing problems in Southern history, and it persuasively shows how closely these issues were interrelated.

DAVID HERBERT DONALD, Charles Warren Professor of American History at Harvard University, is preparing a biography of Abraham Lincoln.

Cloudy Genius

BY ROBERT M. ADAMS

Coleridge: Early Visions by Richard Holmes

(Viking, 409 pp., $22.95)

Coleridge! Like the specter on the Brocken, he has loomed before biographers as he did before his contemporaries, a presence immense but cloudy. In a dozen different lines he achieved just enough to suggest awesome potentialities, yet the record of his life is littered not just with failures but with false starts and vast, vague projects that never even got off the ground. Only a few patently vindictive enemies ever doubted that he was an extraordinary person, and only a few extraordinary persons could put up with the exasperating indecisions and distractions and clouds of enthusiastic, self-suffocating talk that kept him from realizing more than a fraction of his potential.

His multileveled multidirectionality makes him hard to grasp as a whole. A great many studies of aspects of Coleridge have been written, but not very many formal biographies. Somehow the day-by-day bread-and-butter life of such a mercurial, such a vaporous, man has not seemed the best way to get hold of him. Richard Holmes in his new biography (of which only half is now before us—a second volume is promised) has made agile and vigorous efforts to encompass the restless, iridescent variety of Coleridge's existences. He has enjoyed the special advantage of access to the valuable correspondence (edited by E. L. Griggs) and the invaluable private notebooks (edited by Kathleen Coburn), and he has done some exploration, some reconstruction on his own.

To narrate the first thirty years of Coleridge's life, he has in fact accumulated an impressive quantity of specific and often brilliantly vivid detail. We get into Coleridge's repressed and illicit yearnings for Asra (Sara Hutchinson, Wordsworth's sister-in-law). We move into the world of the poet's opium-withdrawal nightmares, follow his mountain-climbing extravaganzas, enter into his contradictory and often phantasmal visions of immense publishing ventures, and endure a full account of his boils, chancres, toothaches, and neurotic as well as somatic ailments. This one volume contains most of what anyone will want to know about Coleridge's early years, and perhaps a little bit more. How the industrious editor has put it all together is another story—not a story of failure, by any means, but of difficulties overcome, tonalities elided, and compromises shaped to be as imperceptible as possible. Faced with an immense, disheveled narrative, Holmes has done an intricate and skillful, if not quite flawless, job of writing.

For a biography, however distracted and cluttered, is and can only be a life story. It has to begin at the beginning, and follow its destined personage from one set of linked circumstances to the next. In previous books Holmes has shown a special interest in tracking down literary figures by retracing their physical footsteps, and a good deal of this literal step-tracing takes place in the

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present volume. Holmes crawls into the little sandstone cave known as Pixies' Parlor, not far from Ottery St. Mary in Devon, where Coleridge spent his first years. (On the rear wall he found the magic initials S.T.C., which he had the good sense to realize were not carved there by the poet-to-be, but must have been the work of a later admirer.) He has looked under the bridge across the river Otter, where seven-year-old Samuel hid out all one night after a particularly fierce fight with his nine-year-old brother, Frank. And he has walked the upland paths leading to Ash Farm, overlooking the Bristol Channel not far from Porlock, where Coleridge composed, or said he could have composed, the full poem of which "Kubla Khan" is the only surviving fragment. And in each of these natural scenes he finds some element of natural imagery or dramatic setting that would recur in Coleridge's later writing.

By itself, this linkage isn't in the least improbable. Coleridge had an amazing memory and a special faculty for transposing and recombining elements of his direct experience with elements of his vagrant reading. He was also fond of mythologizing—often to several different effects—the patterns of his own existence. The story of his fight with Frank, for example, turns up, in a letter to his friend Thomas Poole, only fifteen years after the event itself, and it contrasts with repeated assertions that his youthful existence was singularly happy. (Coleridge in the grip of self-pity could enlist either a forlorn or a joyful childhood in the service of his mood.)

Again, the landscape around Ash Farm, especially what Holmes calls the "erotic, magical geography of Culbone Combe," may have had something to do with "that deep romantic chasm which slanted / Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover." But that is the least wonderful feature of the oriental landscape in the poem. What one couldn't find by walking from Lynton to Clevedon and back is Alph the sacred river, which both sinks and rises within the magic circle of Kubla's walls and towers. The river, with its caves of ice and dancing rocks, its swift, half-intermitted burst, is at the very center of the stately pleasure-dome; and though nothing like it can be found on the map, it's an image (or so I have always thought) of the poem itself erupting into the light from cellars hidden far underground. If anything like this is true, or at least useful, the "erotic" physical facts of Ash Farm have to be combined with, or even overridden by, a very different strain of visionary insight.

Holmes is a very present biographer; where Coleridge sees an oak tree, the biographer sees a symbol of protection and of family continuity, of being rooted into his destiny—along with a decorative allusion to Gainsborough's picture of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Andrews, if one happens to recall that particular portrait. Sometimes these symbolic interpolations work very well indeed, sometimes they appear officious and overexplanatory. There's no way to tell the story without interweaving different levels of events and overlapping implication. Proposing new insights while remaining discreetly invisible is one of a biographer's several contradictory obligations. But Holmes could well be encouraged to do some serious pruning of the vertical pronoun and the personal presence.

Even in the more tangible realms of politics and religion, Holmes's biography, though it tells us where Coleridge went and who he talked to, doesn't enable us to trace the development of his thought very closely. When Hazlitt first saw him, in January 1798, he was being considered as preacher in the Shrewsbury Unitarian Chapel; but how and where and under the influence of what arguments he became a Trinitarian we don't learn very precisely. (It's relatively easy and not uncommon to follow the argument the other way, from Trinitarian to Unitarian or deist or any of the varieties of free-thinking, but thinking your way into belief in the Trinity without simply making it a matter of faith must be the very dickens of a job.) Maybe Coleridge followed some path of Anglican mysticism, as Holmes intimates from time to time, but that formula doesn't get us very close to a thinking man's dialectic.

Again, Holmes describes with high good spirits the storm over Pantisocracy, that anarchistic-democratic Utopia on the Susquehanna, that suddenly blew up in Coleridge's life, and just as suddenly subsided. It was to be a society of radical idealists, including both Coleridge and Southey, who would settle in western Pennsylvania (not far from where Joseph Priestley, the nonconformist preacher, revolutionary sympathizer, and distinguished chemist had settled after England became too hot for him). The Pantisocratics had the visionary advice of an American real estate salesman and the splendid resource of Coleridge's gift of gab. They even had the sense to appreciate that there might be some disagreeably hard work on the

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frontier and to think of recruiting some pick-and-shovel helpers.

But before they could get themselves or their scheme off the ground, their finances collapsed along with their idealistic expectations. Only poor Coleridge was seriously damaged by all this foolishness; looking into the mists of future history, he foresaw a need of scions to carry on the great work, and so persuaded himself to marry the thoroughly unsympathetic Sara Fricker, seeing in her the mother of unborn generations of Pantisocraticians. It was a misstep that led to a lifetime of frustration and misery. Meanwhile, the windy comedy of Pantisocracy disintegrated into the brief, broad farce of Coleridge's career in the cavalry as Trooper Silas Tomkyn Comberbache.

This is a fine, absurdist story, not without overtones of pain and cruelty; Holmes tells it well. But how did this bumbling, blundering clown (who in 1794 was actually discharged from the military service as insane) come just six years later to be writing a penetrating analysis of the minister that was widely acclaimed as a masterpiece? To be sure, he never sat down and produced its long-projected and often-promised counterpart, an equivalent study of Napoleon. But he could do the one article, drafting its 3,000 words in a single twenty-four-hour session. Where did his insights come from, and why was the stream so intermittent? How could he be so silly when he could be so brilliant?

As Holmes remarks, not without acerbity, scholarship since the massive achievement of *The Road to Xanadu* by J. L. Lowes has concentrated on the bookish, memorious side of Coleridge. That sort of analysis often explains where tags, phrases, and bits of imagery in the poems come from originally; but it doesn't help us to understand why they sometimes crystallized into magical structures, sometimes fell abjectly apart. In giving us a strong and vivid picture of the poet in his chosen landscapes, Holmes brings us close to intimacy with his physical circumstances. But that still leaves a veil over Coleridge's varying moods—inspirations and falterings alike. Was he a hesitant and fearful renegade, as Hazlitt came to think, or an inspired, if unsystematic, prophet far ahead of his time? Was he an independent intellect undermined by self-doubt, drugs, and domineering "friends," or an essential parasite, strong only in weakness, redeemed only now and then by a flash of insight, a turn of vivid phrase? In his second volume, which will inevitably be more introspective than this one, Holmes will have a chance to strike closer to the heart of his subject.

But already in this volume a troubling problem has presented itself in the question of the relations between Coleridge and Wordsworth. At first, it seems clear, a balance was struck between two conflicting temperaments and two views of poetry in the makeup of *Lyrical Ballads*. "The Ancient Mariner" was to lead off the first edition, though Coleridge's name was not allowed on the title page. But in the second, two-volume edition, Coleridge's name was again kept off the title page; "The Ancient Mariner" was removed to the back of the collection; and at the last minute, in the course of a tense and obviously uncomfortable confrontation at Grasmere, Wordsworth decided to reject "Christabel" entirely from the collection. At the same time Wordsworth added to the "Preface" condescending and denigratory comments about his "friend's" poetry without showing them to Coleridge. What is worst of all is that Coleridge took the rejection of his poetry as an ultimate judgment passed on himself. Within a few months of the painful scene at Grasmere, he wrote a letter to William Godwin, of which the key passage begins, "The Poet is dead in me." It was no doubt the most painful trauma of his life until that climactic betrayal of October 28, 1810, when a foolish friend let slip that Wordsworth had been warning him (again behind his friend's back) of Coleridge's moral failings.

So where does the burden of guilt get assigned? It's hard to think well of Wordsworth, if only because of the ruthless way he went to work cutting down his friend while indulging in far too much "mental bombast" and moral commonplace about himself. On the other hand, Coleridge had so broad a masochistic streak, leading him to abase himself before Wordsworth, that the virtuous—but gifted—knave may never have suspected how hurtful he was being. Neither one of them ever spoke, or perhaps could have spoken, frankly about the antagonisms being worked out. Holmes, it's apparent, would give his eye teeth for a full account of those four stressful days (October 4-7, 1801) when Coleridge was being jettisoned from *Lyrical Ballads*. But he has nothing positive to go on. Nobody does. We can't even say that Coleridge, with his disorganized feelings, his immense but uncontrollable poetic gifts, and his keen critical mind, wasn't a direct threat to the special poetic talents that Wordsworth was assembling toward a literary career. What happened to Coleridge was something very like murder, but behind it may have lain something very like self-defense. Call it an episode in the long, ruthless war between the sick and the well.

It's hard to know if we should or shouldn't be gratified that none of Coleridge's contemporaries had access to a tape recorder. Everyone, friend and enemy alike, comments on the marvelous range and fluency of Coleridge's conversation; strangers went away overwhelmed by their first impressions, and even familiars listened in rapt silence. We hear the murmurs of occasional applause in Holmes's biography, but the substance of the talk that evoked them we hardly hear about at all. The tape recorder might bring the brilliant monologues before us; equally well, it might bring us nothing but disconnected mumbles. Not all transcripts of brilliant talk come off brilliantly.

In a preliminary comment, Holmes sets himself a lofty and perhaps an excessive standard: "If he does not leap out of these pages—brilliant, animated, endlessly provoking—and invade your imagination (as he has done mine), then I have failed to do him justice." The gimmick here is the word "provoking," which can mean either thought-provoking or simply exasperating. Coleridge was capable of both effects. The biography offers many passages that excite not only the reader's sympathy and admiration, but even his wonder; there are other occasions when, through no fault of his biographer, Coleridge comes off as a whimpering, self-tormenting wretch. As Keats and Shelley would do later, he passed through the lives of his intimates like an avenging angel, infinitely stimulating, infinitely disappointing. Charles Lamb, protecting his unstable sister Mary, would not let her come near Coleridge; he was, though Lamb had gentler words for it, too incandescent.

About half the time Coleridge was a man—not brilliant or animated, but mainly disconsolate—whom in real life we wouldn't want to know. The other half of the time he was a man about whom we couldn't possibly know enough. Nothing would be more satisfying than a demonstration that the marvelous Coleridge was connected somehow—organically, no doubt—with the miserable Coleridge. But that is a demonstration that, though often attempted, has yet to be made to anyone's complete satisfaction.

ROBERT M. ADAMS is the author of *Shakespeare: The Four Romances* (W. W. Norton).

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Breathless

AS I WRITE, YOU CAN ALMOST hear the cigarettes being lit up all over Washington. The limos have gone; the security agents have departed; the media frenzy has degenerated into a listless postcoital hum. All testimony, I guess, to the p.r. skills of the world's favorite globetrotter. But Madonna's latest tour, which just swept through D.C., was even for her something of a political coup. Its key song, "Vogue" (the whole tour is called "Blond Ambition") takes political liberties few others would risk. It refers to a dance craze, "vogueing," inspired by the posing of runway fashion models, and created in the New York club The Garage sometime in the early 1980s. Invented by black transvestites, it caught on among Hispanics but never quite made it to the masses. Pop impresario Malcolm McLaren tried to mainstream it two years ago with a song called "Deep in Vogue" and failed. But here comes Madonna, a decade late, synthesizer and video in tow, and her No. 1 hit has the suburbs vogueing with wild white-bread abandon. Of course, making white millions off the black subculture is a long and venerable tradition in American pop, but what puts Madonna among the truly great is that she gets clean away with it. So far even Al Sharpton hasn't noticed. And they cheer when it's played in politically correct Manhattan. My favorite statement is from Monica Coates, manager of D.C.'s largely black club Tracks: "Madonna just exposed it to a wider audience. The children know she's been into it for a long time, so they don't feel it's something she's appropriated." The only career Madonna could be more successful at than pop music would be mayor of New York, president of a vast multiracial empire, or political consultant to both. Maybe Gorbo should have given Camp David a miss and hung around for a quick meeting. She probably could have squeezed him in while he was here.

ON THE OTHER BLOND AMBITION front, the best political news last month was the British local elections. The conventional wisdom was that Mrs. T would get blown away because of the invidious poll tax. As it turned out, she did quite well—well enough, in fact, that after months of Maggie R.I.P. stories, embarrassed pundits somehow failed to pick up on it. The conservatives increased their majorities in key districts, and Labour leader Neil Kinnock saw his own Labour borough won by the Tories. Surprised? The truth is, the poll tax is the best idea Thatcher's had in years. The U.S. media hyped its worst feature: that it's levied on everyone alike, regardless of income. What they didn't point out was that it's also based on the much overlooked principle of No Representation Without Taxation. Before the new system, British local government taxes were levied entirely on property. In poorer districts, this meant that many voters didn't pay any local taxes at all. So they rationally voted for every service they could get, and corrupt boroughs soon emerged to cater to their every whim. The result was predictable: taxes soared on the few, businesses and homeowners fled, ghettos formed. With the new tax, the really needy are exempted, but the rest are faced with real fiscal responsibility. Call it reverse Reaganism: you actually highlight the cost of government rather than disguise it, and give everyone a clear stake in clean politics. The idea was that, in time, the poor would start voting for the better boroughs they deserved. Sure enough, many districts in which conservatives recently won big had a lower poll tax because of greater efficiency. For all its apparent injustice, the new system means the return of accountability to British local government and the beginnings of some hope for the collapsing British inner city. Maybe someone should mention the idea to Jack Kemp.

I'M NOT SURE WHICH WAS THE most depressing feature of the recent elections in Myanmar: that the military probably won't honor the result or that we've all agreed to start calling Burma by this egregiously silly name. The objections to it go beyond the fact that no one knows what it is, let alone how to pronounce it, even with the help of *The New York Times* (that's Noo Y-awk TYmz). Myanmar, I'm reliably informed, is simply Burmese for Burma, and when the Burmese say it, it sounds like "Burma" anyway. Wackier still, the name wasn't changed out of some lame attempt at anti-Westernism, à la Harare, but because of an astrological prediction that a foreign invasion was imminent. To ward off these evil planetary portents, dictator Ne Win ordered every foreign-sounding name changed to an indigenous one, creating millions of bewildered Burmese in the process. And because of all this the rest of us have to sound as if we just ate something particularly glutinous whenever we talk about the place. Did Joan Quigley ever have this sort of media clout?

I SAW 'LONGTIME COMPANION' the other day, the movie that portrays for straight audiences what it's been like to be gay and besieged by AIDS in the 1980s. I found it somewhat harrowing, but I guess it's tough to see a movie objectively when the subject matter is so sensitive, and when you know people your own age who are HIV-positive, some of whom are dying. A number of people in their twenties these days spend more time at funerals than they do at weddings. One response to all this, I guess, is a sort of escapism. And the weird thing, to me at least, about the movie was that it had something of this quality. It had an almost elegiac sense of history to it, as if it were dealing with something in the past, as if it were already something of a commemoration. The opposite, of course, is actually the case: there will be more deaths in the next couple of years alone than there were throughout the 1980s. Yet now is the time we make and see a movie commemorating the past. The need to remember grows, I suppose, in direct proportion to the need to forget.

ONE THING THAT HELPS, ODDLY enough, is living with a lot of old people. If apartment ads were truthful, the place I just moved into would be listed: no a/c, permanent paella smell in the hallways, New York plumbing, geriatric neighbors. I could do without the first three, but I'd pay more for the last. Sure, you have to hold the elevator a lot and ride your bike more carefully down the corridor. But you can also play your music near the max and the neighbors only wonder why their furniture has been rattling lately; you can talk about the weather in the elevator and know it's the subject of truly fathomless interest; and you get to know people most of us never see on a regular basis. The old seem to enjoy it too: they get to practice the difficult skill of being old with the audience that often appreciates it most: the young. I always thought Ronald Reagan's secret weapon was his mastery of this dying art, hence his rapport with the old-deprived under-thirties. Equally adept, though he'd wince at the comparison, was TNR's late Henry Fairlie. Though only in his mid-sixties, he got into training as an old codger young, hamming it up with the youngsters around him in a way that was as richly entertaining for us as it was for him. At times he came close to the perfect mix of arbitrary crankiness, occasional wistfulness, and recalcitrant style that is the true art of being old. Henry probably thought the only sensible meaning for "vogueing" was charging your free-lance expenses to a glossy women's fashion magazine. And truth be told, of course, he was probably right.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

Andrew Sullivan is a former TNR associate editor.

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this year, it

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